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MY STORY

Books by Hall Caine

My Story	The Deemster
The Prodigal Son	The Bondman
The Eternal City	The Scapegoat
The Christian	The Little Manx Nation
The Manxman	Capt'n Davy's Honeymoon

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, New York

INTRODUCTION

When I began to write this book I had no other intention than that of revising and perhaps enlarging a little volume of recollections of Rossetti which I had published immediately after the poet's death; but I had not gone far before I realised that I was doing two things which I had not contemplated—I was producing an entirely new book that owed little or nothing to the earlier effort, and I was presenting a portrait of my friend that could only be of value to the student of life in relation to its point of view.

That point of view, when I came to consider it, was, I thought, fresh, and such as might be found to be interesting. A young man of five-and-twenty, brought up in the country, untutored and unknown, with nothing to recommend him but some knowledge and an immense love of books, had by certain strange revolutions of the wheel of chance become the intimate friend, and for a while the companion and housemate, of a great and illustrious poet-

painter, who had been born in a very hot-bed of literature and art, and was then living out in the closest seclusion the last days of a life that was saddened by many unhappy experiences, and quite unbrightened by world-wide fame. Such was the basis of my relation with Rossetti, and sitting down now, at more than twice the age to which I had attained when the poet and I lived together, to paint in loving memory a picture of my friend as he had presented himself to me, I soon became aware that, however unwittingly, I was a principal character in my own drama, and was hardly doing more than making a record of my first great literary friendship.

Therefore the consciousness, from which I could not escape, that, little as I had intended to produce an autobiography, I was at all events writing an account of my beginning in literature, led me at length to look frankly at my task as such, with the result that the book, as now published, contains much beside my recollections of Rossetti, though these must needs bulk largely in any story of my first twenty-five years, so great was my debt to the friend who did so much for me in those days, and so lasting the influence which his friend-

ship, if not his mind or his art, has since exercised upon me.

Knowing well, however, that there is much in the life of nearly every man of letters, and in my own life in particular, that can be of little interest to the public, I made no attempt whatever to tell a detailed story of my early days, but confined my autobiographical fragment to an account of my literary relations, sometimes very intimate, sometimes very slight, always very important to me, with Ruskin, R. D. Blackmore, Wilkie Collins, Robert Buchanan, T. E. Brown, Henry Irving, Tennyson, and Gladstone, as well as the great and unhappy poet whose sad comradeship during his last dark days gave me an excuse for the majority of these pages.

Nevertheless, in eliminating my personal narrative, except so far as it concerned these large and lasting figures, I thought I might be pardoned if I began my book with a sketch of my childhood and youth in the Isle of Man, partly for the sake of the picture it must needs present of a curiously self-centred little community that was strangely out of touch and harmony with the rest of our kingdom as recently as half a century ago, and partly, perhaps, for such interest as it might possibly

possess for some of the readers of the novels with which my name is usually associated.

Aside, however, from this section of its contents, the volume I now offer to the public will, I trust, be found to be not so much an autobiography of my first twenty-five years as my grateful and affectionate story of those first friendships which have been the most precious rewards of my literary life, and the best things I have got for my books.

H. C.

KHARTOUM, 1908.

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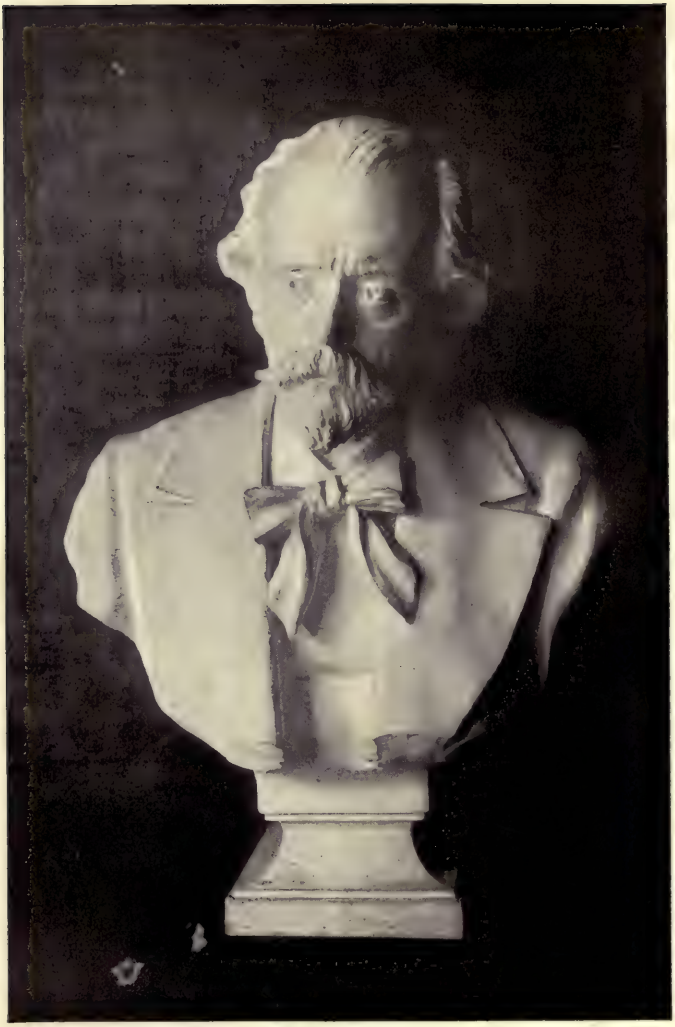

HALL CAINE.

MY STORY

By HALL CAINE

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS IN THE ISLE OF MAN

THE story of how I became a novelist takes me back nearly fifty years, when, as a child of five, I was living off and on at intervals in a little thatched cottage on the high-road through one of the remoter parishes in the Isle of Man. It was the home of an uncle who was a small farmer as well as a butcher. In his character as farmer he cultivated some thirty acres of land, much of it hilly and hungry, and some of it boggy and peaty. In his character as butcher he killed the sheep he had grazed on the mountain slopes, and made weekly journeys to Douglas, the chief town of the island, to sell his meat from a stall which stood in the market-place under the turret of an old church.

On one of these journeys I was permitted to go with him, and though I knew it so little at the time, I think now that not only my first clear impression of the Isle of Man, but also

my earliest sense of life and the world, must date from that experience. A range of hills crosses the island from the northeast to the northwest, and our home lay on the north side of them, while Douglas lies on the south. My recollection is that, contrary to the usual practice of farmer butchers, which was to go round the little range, my uncle travelled to Douglas by a pass that crossed the mountains through the valley called Sulby Glen. In order to realise what that journey meant to me, and the impression it made upon my mind, it is necessary to think of me as a child.

We were in an open cart without springs, and a corner was left for me amid the carcasses of sheep and lambs, and the clusters of "plucks" and "heads," while the uncle, in the Garibaldian red shirt he generally wore, sat on the front board with his feet on the shaft. That ascent of Snaefell, and the getting to the top, and then the wilderness of waste space with the sea on every hand, and finally the descent into the new world beyond, where the unknown town lay far away in the depths below, was a breathless adventure. I have crossed most of the great passes of Europe since then, but none of them have brought me such a thrilling sense of the vastness of the world and the

mighty things of nature. And yet it was only our poor little Isle of Man seen through the eyes of a child.

I remember that it was dark when we reached Douglas, and that the bustle and stir of the principal thoroughfare, Strand Street (narrow still, but narrower then, I think, than it now is), seemed to me perilous and bewildering. The little town with its ten thousand inhabitants, or less, was full of the teeming and tumultuous life of a vast and mighty city. We put up for the night somewhere behind the market-place, in a house frequented by other farmer butchers from the country, and we slept in the same room with four of them. In the cottage in Ballaugh we had a room to ourselves, though it was little and the roof lay low over it, and when you were lying in bed, you could smell the sweet "scraas," the dry turf bedding, under the thatch; but this was a vast chamber, some twelve feet by fifteen at the least, with three beds and a sheepskin by the side of each of them.

We had brought our dog with us, a white-eyed Manx collie, and I remember that he slept on the sheepskin by the bedside, while the dogs of our room-fellows, being of a quarrelsome disposition, had to sleep outside the bedroom

door. And thus, amid the gossip of the men as they talked in the darkness after going to bed, very tired, yet with a large sense of being a mighty traveller, I fell asleep. I have travelled a good deal since then, but I do not think I have ever gone to bed in Africa or Asia or America or within the Arctic Circle with so strong a sense of being a whole hemisphere away from home.

Next morning I was the last to be stirring, and by that time the booths were all up in the market-place, and there was a great cackle and cry there, and business was going like a forest fire. I could see my uncle in a linen apron, and he was putting the copper and silver of his customers into the two pockets of a bag which was stitched to the front of it, and their gold into a stocking purse which he kept in his breeches pocket. The bag became big and the stocking became fat, and I had a sense of boundless wealth which will never come again.

The great day came to an end at length, and then the booth was taken down and our mare was brought round and harnessed to her empty cart, and we drove away in a long line of other empty carts through the gathering darkness of Saturday night—the farmer butcher in his red shirt, and the great little traveller, very

tired and sleepy, snoozing down under the covering of a moist new sheepskin, along the main westerly road of the island, the Peel road, under the house (which seemed so vast) where I live now with my own children, up Creg Willie's hill at the tail of the mountain range, and thus home to the thatched cottage in Ballaugh.

This is a very simple story, but I think it records in its homely way the birth of what the public has been pleased to call the Manx novelist. The child is father to the man, and what I felt nearly fifty years ago about the Isle of Man, that it was the whole world in little, that all the interests, all the emotions, all the passions, and almost all the experiences of mankind lay there on that rock in the Irish Sea, has been the motive inspiring my books. It has inspired the books which have had the island for their scene no more than those which have not, for if I have learned anything by five-and-twenty years of almost continuous travel it is that humanity is one and the same everywhere, and that nothing I had known of our tiny Manx race was out of harmony with what I saw in races great and small at the farthest corners of the earth.

I hold myself, however, more fortunate than

some of my fellow-novelists (though beginning life with many obvious disadvantages, and under conditions so little likely to develop the literary faculty) in being brought up as a boy in a little self-centred community where it was possible to see the human drama very plain because very close. We were forty or fifty thousand all told in the Isle of Man, and we were really as one big family whereof nearly every member seemed to know something of nearly everybody else. Our isolation from the rest of the kingdom, our inevitable intermarriage, and the unity of our material interests made our impulses, our passions, our beliefs, our superstitions an open book for any of us to read, and it must have been my own fault if, with so many opportunities of reading the human story in the impressionable days of childhood, I did not learn a little of it by heart.

The thatched cottage in Ballaugh was the home of my grandmother as well as my uncle, and I remember her almost entirely (for she died when I was still a child) as the source of certain superstitious beliefs which to this hour I find it impossible to shake off. She was a little Manxwoman, very old and much bent, dressed in the blue homespun of the island, and occupied with the light labour of the house-

hold, while the lustier members of the family were at work in the fields. I see her in my mind's eye yet gathering up the dry gorse that lay about the stack yard, then feeding the fire under the "oven pot" that hung from the "sloughry," a long iron rod and hook, over the open hearth. She called me "Hommy-beg," which was Manx for "little Tommy," and I think I must have been much in her company, for I have the clearest memory of countless stories she told me of fairies and witches and witch doctors and the evil eye.

One of her stories was of a troop of fairies who chased her home on a moonlight night when she was a girl. They were merry little fellows, wearing cocked hats and velvet jackets, and they kept prancing and dancing about her as she ran in frantic terror along the lonely road until she came within sight of the lighted window of her mother's house on the "curragh," the marshy meadow land, and then they suddenly disappeared. Some of them were malignant as well as mischievous, and she had seen them flitting along with lanterns, the night after a storm, to the door of some lone woman whose man was a fisherman away at the "herrings" and was afterward found to be lost at sea. There were good fairies, too, and one of

these, whose name was Phonoderee, would come to poor people's houses at night, when everybody was asleep, and card the wool for the women and churn the milk for the girls. You had to be kind to Phonoderee or he might become angry and even spiteful, so last thing at night, before going to bed, my grandmother would lay out on the kitchen table a crock of fresh water, with perhaps a bowl of new milk and a plate of "bonnag," which was barley bread. I remember to have seen her do it.

She believed in every kind of supernatural influence, the earth and the air were full of spiritual things for her, and I suppose some of her simple faith must have fixed itself on the cells of my brain, for, however stubborn the scepticism of my waking hours, in my sleep the superstitions of my childhood are with me still. I cannot remember that she could read, and yet she knew much of the Manx Bible by heart, and by the exercise of some unaccountable sense she could turn up a text at the proper page. She certainly could not write, and one of the miracles of life to her was how I, at five or six years of age, could "read writing," but she knew a world of things which I did not know and have never in the same degree been able to learn. She knew when the

storms were coming by a look at the sky, and she could tell the time within a few minutes by sight of the stars. She knew a bad man as she knew the clouds by the signs of trouble in his face, and she could see a good heart through a clear countenance as she saw the stones at the bottom of the well. I think of her as she used to sit on a low, three-legged stool, feeding the fire with the crackling gorse, while she told me wondrous tales of the "little men," and I tell myself now that, bewildered as she would have been to hear it, my old Manx grandmother was a poet.

It will be gathered from what I have said that my grandmother's house was a poor one, but I can truly say that though poverty lived under that simple roof-tree it was poverty so sweet, so clean, so free from want that in all the years since I have never seen wealth that has seemed to me so human and so beautiful. The kitchen was our dining-room as well as our cooking-room, for the parlour was a chill place, never entered except when the parson called—a mausoleum of musty knitted things and curious pieces of old china. But in the warm and living kitchen the middle of the floor might be only of hard earth, but the flagstones around it and the big blue hearthstone in the

open ingle were always washed and whitened; the plates on the dresser were always bright, and hams always hung with the whips from hooks in the whitewashed joists of the floor above.

We burned peat, for coal was dear in those days, and whenever I smell a turf fire now I am fifty years younger in a minute. Our tallow candles were made by my grandmother in a kind of iron dip, which I have never seen since, and she span yarn from the wool of our own sheep, and it was woven by an old weaver who lived alone with his loom near by, and then it was made into clothes for the men and sometimes into petticoats for the women by the travelling tailor, who came and sat cross-legged on the kitchen table. Our food was as simple as it could be, and nothing could have been more simply served. On Sundays we usually had two or three boiled sheep's heads, hot for dinner and cold for supper, and on other days of the week we generally had potatoes and herrings. The herrings were on separate plates about the table, but the potatoes, which were always boiled in their jackets, were piled up in one great dish in the middle, and we helped ourselves as we required. At breakfast we often ate eggs, which were plentiful, and some-

Manx Cottage, Sulley.

times drank tea, that cost four shillings a pound, I remember; but we always had porridge, which, being boiled in the oven pot and poured into a large white bowl, stood in the centre of the table with a big spoon in it by which everybody helped himself, lifting what he wanted into his basin of fresh milk—warm and frothy for me from the morning's milking. We had no well, and therefore no pump, and consequently no pipes, but we got our water from a stream that ran down the mountainside, and kept it in a tall crock in a corner of the kitchen, brown on the outside and blue-black within, and when we wanted a drink we dipped a little blue basin into it. We all sat together at meals, the master of the house and the farm man, the casual caller, and even the passing beggar (though we never thought of calling him so), only the grandmother, like Martha, on her feet, busy with much serving.

If I have painted this little picture of our primitive patriarchal life in a remote parish of the Isle of Man as recently as fifty years ago, it has not been merely for its own sake, but chiefly in order to say that poverty, if it is sweet and not bitter, is in my view a condition far more blessed of God than wealth, bringing human hearts closer together in mu-

tual dependence and brotherhood. I think that is why the poor are so good to each other, and when I remember the intimacies of my own earlier days, both in my grandmother's house and in my mother's, my rapturous joy in the possession of little things, I am almost sorry for my own children because they were born to a condition of life which I had worked so hard to make better than my own. Certain I am that for the work I had to do in reading and describing the characters of people nothing could have been so good for me as the life I lived in my youth.

There was an aunt in our household at Ballaugh, a strapping country girl in her twenties, not yet married, and through her I came to learn something of more substantial aspects of life. I remember that it was an accepted law of Manx courtship in those days that it should be done late at night after the elder members of the family had put out the "dip" candles and gone to bed, leaving the dark kitchen to the girls, whose "boys" by an amiable fiction were supposed to be unknown. I also remember that in other houses this custom had its obvious consequences, and that there was too often a "bye-child" in a country house. But our community was generally indulgent to sins

of the senses, and one of the insular laws, conceived, I think, by the good Bishop Wilson, was meant to make it easy for transgressors to atone for their transgressions both to their offspring and to themselves. If a girl who had given birth to a bastard married the father of it "within a year or two," never having compromised herself by relations with another man, her child became legitimate. I remember that there was a curious ceremony of legitimation, wherein the mother while being married in church tucked her baby under her petticoat, but whether I ever witnessed a scene like this or only heard of it I cannot recall. What certainly remains with me is a vivid sense of the spiritual righteousness of this old Manx law, and I think more than one of my books derives something from my memory of its beneficent effect.

We were a litigious lot in the Isle of Man fifty years ago, and the members of our big family were constantly quarrelling in the courts. I think our people liked the excitement of legal disputes, and I have known two brothers "put the law" on each other about a coil of rope. As a result everybody knew everything about everybody else, their quarrels, their property and their prospects, so that the peo-

ple of one parish were as the members not of one family merely but of one household, and a cow could not calve or a sow have a litter of pigs but we all knew something about it. This may have made good ground for envy and malice and all uncharitableness, but it made good ground for Christian charity and brotherly affection, too, and it certainly made good ground for the student of life if there was a child among us "takin' notes."

We had no poor law in the Isle of Man in my boyhood, and the machinery whereby alms were distributed to the old and incapable was of the simplest and most patriarchal. When age or asthma, or more frequently rheumatism, left a man unable to follow either of the twin callings of the Manxman, fishing or farming, he made up his mind without many qualms to "go on the houses." This was a species of pauperism which apparently hurt no man's pride, for it merely consisted in paying calls on his neighbours at certain seasons of the year, once, twice, or thrice, and being assisted in kind toward the maintenance of his own household. He was generally an old "widda man," a widower, living alone in some little mud cottage on the curragh, but sometimes he had an old invalid wife at home, bedridden for

years, and he came with a sack into which his neighbours poured measures of meal, both oatmeal and barley meal, and then gave him perhaps some pinches of tea screwed up in paper, which he stowed away in his waistcoat pocket.

I saw many such visitors in my early days, and one of them, known as Charles, was a kind of privileged pet of everybody, being "hardly wise," and yet capable of flashes of wit and sallies of satire that were the current coin of the whole country. As far as I can remember Charles had no fixed abode, but tramped the island from north to south, and therefore lived "on the houses" in every sense. He came, as by right, and took his seat without ado in the "chollagh," the warm place in the open ingle. There was a bed for him everywhere, if it was only a shake-down in the loft of the stable, and he went away when he was so minded. He was welcomed in a spirit of charity that had not a particle of pride in it, but he earned his board by bringing "the newses" from other places. Charles, like the travelling tailor who came at intervals to make our clothes out of our own homespun, was the perambulating reporter of the period. He claimed a reporter's right to subedit his intelligences, and exercised it with an effect that was sometimes startling. I see

him still in my mind's eye, the wild-eyed old beggar with a ram's horn swung about his neck, for he was a great follower of Father Matthew and a fierce foe of the publicans, and as often as he came upon a brewery he went braying round it by the hour in the full conviction that, like the walls of Jericho, it must some day fall.

I am afraid it must be admitted that lunacy was not rare in our little close community, for consanguinity in marriage was commoner than it is now, and I remember with a shiver and a thrill the shifts our poor people were put to as late as my own early days to provide for the insane. There was no asylum in the island then, and if a man went mad and was believed to be dangerous he was put away in an outhouse with a chain to his leg and straw for his bed. I must have seen many maniacs in this condition, and nothing I have since learned of insanity has left so strong a sense of its terrors. Sometimes it was the father of the family who was thus stowed away, sometimes a son, but occasionally the mother, the "big woman" of the farm and the person least easy to spare, while the eldest girl took up the duties of the woman of the house, as well as tended and cleaned, and perhaps scolded and chastised the lone one in the loft. I think of

the horror of the padlocked place, of the wild cries in the middle of stormy nights, of the possible moments of sanity in the insane, of the feeling of the rest of the family that the father, son, sister, mother is with them and not of them, outside in the outhouse while they lie warm in their beds, separated by something more cruel than death, more asundering than the grave, and I wonder that the awful condition could have been allowed to last so long.

It lasted until Wilkie Collins visited the island when he was writing "Armadale," and I remember hearing from a former attorney-general, Sir James Gell, that after certain letters written by Collins to the *Times* the Home Office told our insular Legislature that if they did not quickly make proper provision for their poor lunatics the imperial authorities would do so and charge them with the expense.

Our Government in those days was an anomalous creation mingled of officialism and feudal power. We had inherited a right to rule ourselves without restraint from the English Parliament, and we did so by means of a people's chamber, the House of Keys, whereof the members elected themselves, and acted under a governor and executive council appointed by the English Crown. As a consequence, the peo-

ple of the soil had sometimes to be grateful if they were permitted to exist, and among my earliest memories is that of my uncle in the Garibaldian red shirt protesting to an inspector, who was calling for *corvée*—forced labour on the roads—that if things went much farther we should not be "able to call our souls our own."

I do not know if it was a result of our autocratic form of government that the banks became so powerful that they were able to demand higher and higher interest until the farmers could scarcely live, but I remember that a kind of amateur banker, the parish money lender, was created by this condition. One such person, a gombeen woman, came very close to my own family, and was supposed to have been the ruin of my grandfather, who was a bit of a Bohemian, God forgive him, and sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. I must have seen this lady at close quarters, for I have a vivid recollection of certain incidents of her last illness, when she "got religion" and began to have misgivings about the way she had got her gold. In the middle of a stormy night she sent for "Uncle Bill," and asked him what she ought to do that she might make her peace with God, whereupon Uncle Bill, being practical in

his religion, advised the immediate return of all the money she had made amiss.

"That's impossible," she said. "Some of the people are under the sod these teens of years."

"Then give the money to their children," said Uncle Bill, and my recollection is that she made a certain show of doing so.

It was a weird enough scene at her death-bed, the withered old woman counting out her ill-got gold and giving it back with a reluctant hand to the children whose parents she had wronged, while the "Primitive" class leader "put up a word of prayer" or led the company in the verse of a hymn. I gave it all at full length, but with some inevitable embellishments, in one of the books I wrote years afterward.

The religious life of the Isle of Man fifty years ago was perhaps on the whole more vocal than active. There was deep piety in many places, and the best of my memories of those days is of the sweet and simple faith which expressed itself in the homely lives of the farmers and fishermen, with their good wives and daughters, among whom I lived. I recall the little Methodist chapels dotted over every part of the island where, not on Sundays only but

on the evenings of other days of the week, a few rugged men, with their big coarse hands and their tanned and seamy faces, would pray together with the fervor of saints, in language gathered from the "old book" that had an elevation and a distinction that is lost to modern speech. I recall, too, the camp meetings of that time with their rugged peasant preachers, great preachers as I think they must have been, judging by the effects they produced upon their hearers, and the delirious emotion that used to pass over the people as with the rush of a mighty wind.

But in the community as a whole there was a curious mixture of sincerity and insincerity that was often grotesque and sometimes humorous. I remember that intemperance was not one of the failings to which our religious toleration denied frequent forgiveness, and I recall an occasion on which a kinsman of my own, who was equally famous for his love of "jough," a kind of Manx ale, and his zealous efforts on the "plan-beg," the little plan, having returned home from market on Saturday night at the bottom of the cart, preached on Sunday morning on the evils of backsliding.

Drink was the besetting evil of the island in my early days, and I think I shall not wrong

the truth if I say that nearly every house on the main roads was in some sort a public house. As a consequence there were high doings on the highway on market days, and the Manxman's sense of being of one big family with all other Manxmen was not carried so far as to interfere with his right to administer a little brotherly chastisement. Town was against country in these domestic encounters of parish against parish. I can even remember that in a parish of both hill and dale, Kirk Maughold, the men of the "up-side" looked askance at the men of the "down-side," and were not sorry if Saturday night gave them an opportunity of settling their geographical differences on the road. It was all very like a ridiculous travesty of the national quarrels about which we hold cabinet councils in the great States of the world, and as in their case so in ours, no tame interpretation of the doctrine of Christianity was permitted to interpose.

I remember, too, that religion was kept in its place with us, as with greater races, whenever it threatened to interfere with economic interests, though of course in our tiny community the manifestations of dishonesty looked large and crude and primitive. Among my earliest memories is that of a terrible storm

early in the spring, and of being awakened in the middle of the night by shrill shouts outside, where the men of our little farm were struggling to hold down the thatched roof of the house by throwing ropes over it and weighting them down with stones, while the wind carried off their voices like the screams of seagulls, and the boughs of an oak tree lashed the window of the bedroom in which I found myself alone. Next morning the sun was shining, and the air was as still as a sleeping child, and then we heard of a schooner that had been wrecked on the coast a mile or two down our side lane, and of rolls of English cloth which had been washed ashore. I would not say there was any suspicion of wrecking, but there were whispers of a sort of smuggling, and of a stone tomb in the old Ballaugh church that showed signs of having been disturbed, and perhaps these surmises derived a certain confirmation when on Whitsunday the stalwart sons and smart daughters of the farmer nearest to the sea presented themselves in church in brand-new suits of a wondrous English pattern.

We were then, as we are now, a people strong in Nonconformity, for when the clergy, under the corrupting influence of the braggart

court of the latest of our Lords of Man, neglected the spiritual needs of the people, Wesley came over and swept the island as with a mighty wave, but never did Church and Dissent live on easier terms together. I remember that one of my many uncles in varying degrees removed, for we were all kinsfolk, was at once a class leader among the "Primitives" and Vicar's warden as well, and I cannot recall an instance in which his two functions were found to conflict.

What left perhaps the strongest impression on my mind were the many proofs that the church belonged to the people, and that there were times when they could almost go the length of turning the parson out of it. One of these was Christmas Eve, when it was the custom of the parishioners to hold a service by themselves. The service was called "Oiel Verree," the Eve of Mary, and consisted of the singing of "carvals," carols, some of them sacred and often shockingly crude in their literary colouring, but most of them secular and sometimes profane in both senses. I daresay the original aim of the Oiel Verree was to deepen the spiritual life of the people by means of the only old poetic literature the island possessed, but in my early days it was made an

excuse for scenes that were often more amusing than reverential.

We all took candles to church, I remember, and held them lighted in our hands, as we sat in the pews, while the carol singers, generally two abreast, walked down the central "aisle," beginning at the porch and facing the altar, and taking a step forward at the conclusion of every verse. The carols most in favour were those that gave the raciest paraphrase of incidents in the Old Testament, and one that consisted of a running commentary on all the bad women in the Bible was especially popular. By way of punctuating the points of such productions we threw dried peas and sometimes our candles at the performers, with results that were not always an honour to the parish church. Naturally, the clergy were not usually favourable to the annual service, as it used to be performed, and being powerless to abolish a time-honoured custom, they made many angry protests. I remember one such protest that came like a boomerang when it was aimed at a half-witted carval singer, named Billy Corkill. Old Billy and I were going to Oiel Verree when he met the parson, a testy person, coming out of the church.

"Mind you behave yourselves to-night,"

said the parson, "and don't turn my church into a bear garden."

"The church is the people's, I'm thinkin'," said Billy.

"The people are as impudent as goats," said the parson, whereupon Billy, without turning a hair, quietly replied:

"Aw, well, you are the shepherd, so just make sheeps of them."

Such was the life of the Isle of Man as I saw it through the eyes of a child, and I trust I have reproduced a little of it in my books, with its quaint and curious customs, its simple faith, its terse and racy speech. We were cut off from the mainland by thirty miles of sea on every side, and though a steamer sailed to Liverpool every day it was hardly once in a lifetime that any of our country people left our shores unless perchance they were leaving them for good. In the remoter parishes there was no postman, and when letters came for us they were put up in the windows of the post-office in the village to be seen and called for. We had one or two insular newspapers, but the farmers rarely read them, and those who did so learned little or nothing of the things going on in the world outside. There were no railways in the island then, and when we travelled

to market or to the annual fairs of our four little towns it was either afoot or on the jolting cross-board of the springless cart.

Naturally, there was another side to the life of the Isle of Man; there was the life of the towns, of Douglas, with its ten thousand inhabitants and its visiting industry already begun; of Castletown, technically our capital and still, I think, the seat of our Government; of Ramsey, the asylum of many half-pay officers living cheap on our low customs and small rents; and of Peel, the home of the fishing trade with its fleet of some hundreds of small "Nickeys" and big boats. Then there was the life of our landed gentry, very clannish and exclusive, of our college professors, remote and austere, as well as the parsons, often very sweet old souls who acted as intermediaries between us and the people above, especially the Lord Bishop, our neighbour at Bishop's Court, who was driven in a carriage with two high-stepping horses by an English coachman in livery, and was talked of with bated breath. But this was a higher side of the insular life which in those days I knew little or nothing about, and if the loss was mine in many ways I do not regret it too bitterly since it left me in close touch with the soil, with the simple lives of a simple peo-

RUSHEN CASTLE, CASTLETOWN, ISLE OF MAN.

ple; and to have been brought up in these conditions was, perhaps, for one who had my work to do in later life, to be entered in the best if the humblest university of the world. So Manxland is my *alma mater* after all, for she has taught me more than the lore of her own little island, and when I set myself to understand humanity in any quarter of the world, whether it is among the Icelanders on the edge of the Arctic Circle, or, as now happens, among the Soudanese on the verge of the Equator, I find myself going back in memory to what I learned of the human heart in the days when I lay in bed in the little thatched cottage in Ballaugh, with the sweet-smelling "scraas" so close overhead, listening for a while, before dropping off to sleep, through the floor that had no ceiling under it, to the voices of the people who were talking in Manx in the kitchen below.

CHAPTER II

EARLY DAYS IN LIVERPOOL

ALTHOUGH so much of my childhood and boyhood was spent in the Isle of Man, my real home, the home of my parents, was in Liverpool. My father, as a younger son of a farmer who had dissipated the little he inherited, had recognised the necessity of going farther afield for a livelihood, and crossing to Liverpool while still a young man he had established himself there in a humble way of life. If I were writing an autobiography in the accepted sense I think I should be tempted to tell some touching stories of how my father, as a friendless and penniless boy, scrambled and starved himself through the seven long years that were supposed to be necessary to teach him a trade; and again, after he had married and children had begun to come, starved and scrambled, or at least pinched and deprived himself, with the cheerful co-operation of my mother, through the years in which I and my

first brother and sister had to be sent to school. The world went well with him in later days, and his children of a younger brood knew nothing of his privations, but it is not for me, as his eldest son, to forget the stoical unselfishness to which I owe so much.

I have spoken of the life of the Manx people in their own island as that of a close community, self-centred and conservative, and suffering in various ways from this catlike devotion to home. But there is the Gipsy in the Manx people, too, and no lack of the adventurous spirit. Inheriting something from their Viking ancestors, Manxmen are good colonists, and I think there is no remote corner of the world yet visited by me where I have not found a Manxman settled. He does well nearly everywhere, and contentedly adapts himself to the country that becomes his foster mother. But he never forgets his natural mother for all that, and whatever the greatness and grandeur of the country he lives in, he always clings to the belief that the Isle of Man is the most beautiful and desirable place in the world. It is a touching fact, and if it is a fallacy it is not the less sweet on that account. Our little island *is* a lovely place, and though the winds sweep over it in winter, and the sea that sur-

rounds it is sometimes terrible, though there are greater and grander things in many countries, there are none of us to whom it is not after all the fairest spot the sun shines upon. But, whatever it is, it is our mother, and just as blood calls to blood, though it may be over many generations, so across the countries which separate him from his home there is always a deep call to the Manxman's heart from the soil that gave him birth.

My father had the root of this in him through all the years of his exile in Liverpool, but though he was so near to the island he was rarely able to go back, and I find it a touching instance of the call of blood that not being able to go himself he was always sending me for periods long or short, and thus in a second generation his Manxness expressed itself in the end by the return of his family to his native soil.

But, meanwhile, it was in Liverpool for the most part that I went to school, and there, while I was still a very young boy, I started in life. I was something of an adventurous city Gipsy myself when I first tramped out into the world, and my recollection is that the direction I took was due to nothing more serious than an impression that I could draw and the sight

of an advertisement asking for a pupil to an architect. The architect turned out to be a remote member of the Gladstone family, and through him I came into casual relations with the great statesman. It must have been in the year 1868 that I saw Gladstone first, for I have some recollection of running all day long, on the day of the great election, to his brother's office in Union Court, with telegrams announcing the results of the contests all over the country. I see him as he was then, sitting behind an office table, a tall man in a stiff-looking frock-coat of the fashion of an earlier day, with a pale face and side whiskers and very straight black hair, thin on the crown and brushed close across his forehead. He was my hero, my idol, my demi-god, in those days, but that did not prevent my blurting out the big news of great majorities before he had time to open his telegrams, and then his pale, serious, shadowed face, almost sad, and apparently preoccupied, would lighten to a smile that was like sunshine.

I saw Gladstone again a little later when he was spending a few days on his property at Seaforth which my master had been required to survey. The surveyor-in-chief had not appeared one morning, and I, the smallest of boys of fifteen, acting as his deputy, was ordering

about two or three big hulking indolent chain men, when the statesman, now Prime Minister and paler and graver than ever, came out of the Vicarage to look on. I could see that he was more amused than I was, and then he came up to me and asked to see my maps and the figures in my survey book, and I remember that I gave him a large explanation of the peculiarities of his estate with its hedges that ought to be straightened and its by-roads that were bad. He listened quite attentively for a considerable time, and then, not having made any other remark, he patted me on the top of my head—it was easy to do so—and said I would do something some day.

I did not expect him to remember me, but I think he must have done so, for quite two years afterward, without any intervening incident or other point of touch, I had a letter from the office in Union Court saying that his brother wished to make me the steward of the Gladstone estates in Lancashire. I was sorely tempted to accept the offer, for Gladstone was still my demi-god, and I suppose if I had done so the whole current of my life might have been different, but my friends advised me to decline, having by this time conceived an idea that I had the makings of an architect, and

that business, the inevitable adjunct of politics, would break my career.

Their expectations were, however, in no way of being fulfilled, for, already, books had called off the devotion that ought to have been given to the drawing board and T-square, and I was consuming every kind of literature that came my way. The Free Library at Liverpool was my great hunting ground in those days, and surely no young reader ever ran so wild in a wilderness of books. I read everything without guidance of any kind—poetry, history, drama, romance, metaphysics, theology—galloping through all at equal pace, a fresh book about every other day, until I had more miscellaneous literature on the top of my head than any boy I have ever known or ever wish to know. This went on in its irregular and scarcely serviceable way for several years, so that in later life I seem to have been doing little else than read over again, I trust with a more tutored mind, a few of the books I read before I was twenty years of age.

I was writing, too (I can hardly recall a time when I did not write), with the same aimless and unguided ardour, essays, poems, plays, novels, and histories—generally histories whereof facts were not always the principal factors.

There was the "scribbling itch" in all this, but I cannot remember that there was any of the publishing mania, for as soon as a thing was done it was done with, and it found its way to the bottom of a trunk. Naturally, a desire to enlighten the world came in its due course, and how I began to publish is another story.

From my earliest school days I had had a friend, a boy of Welsh parentage, whose upbringing had been not unlike my own. He is dead now, but he lived long enough to hear that Tolstoi had spoken of one of his works as "the best example of modern English fiction," and yet his beginnings were not such as might lead any one to expect that he would become known as a writer of books. When I saw him first I can no more tell than one could say when he began to know his own twin brother. My earliest recollections are of a stiff-set little chap with twinkling eyes, a merry laugh, and two round cheeks like rosy apples, fond of mimicry, always in mischief, often in disgrace, frequently going through various forms of punishment, and taking his drubbings in the spirit of one who thought they were part of the humour of daily life.

This was William Tirebuck, and after he, too, had left school and launched himself in the

school of life, going through all manner of grotesque experiences which he turned to high account in later life, we began, he and I, still in our teens, to unite our powerful interest in literature. Our activities were first directed toward the establishment of a monthly manuscript magazine, which we conducted for about two months, with the strenuous assistance of an elder and more staid-minded sister of my friend. What his own literary qualifications were at that moment I cannot now remember, except that he wrote a clear and rapid hand, and that he was always ready to put this good and gracious gift at the service of his chief contributor. My recollection is that my friend played the parts of editor, printer, publisher, and postman, while I charged myself with the duties of principal author. Of course ours was a serious publication, and if it is anywhere still extant it may at least be of interest as the first book of two budding collaborators, who at sixteen and seventeen, respectively, undertook, each in his own way, to settle for a select circle the problems of the universe.

Then came an event of immense consequence to both of us. One of the contributors to our manuscript magazine inherited a small fortune, and, by what means I cannot say, came

into control of it while he was still a boy. That was bad for the fortune and not good for the boy, but it was decidedly stimulating to our literary ambitions. The first thing we did was to *print* our magazine. We only printed it once, I remember, but I think the publication must have been quite alone of its kind. It consisted chiefly or entirely of a very long blank-verse poem written by me, and a glowing appreciation of it written by my friend. I believe we struck off ten thousand, but I never heard of anybody buying a copy. Nobody has ever told me that he has seen that poem, and I doubt if anybody ever will.

Thus our first free plunge into literature proved to be a plunge into hot water, and when the fortunes of our boy capitalist were finally submerged, my friend put on the life belt of sober sense for a time and swam back to commerce, his place as junior clerk in a merchant's office, while I, with less wisdom, threw up my architecture at the first hint of one of the nervous attacks which even then beset me, and returned to the Isle of Man. This time I went to another uncle, in another part of the island, a schoolmaster, and a man of some culture, who comforted my father and mother, after I had gone through many parental scoldings and

been the cause of many parental tears, by giving it as his opinion that if the worst came to the worst I might some day be able to make a living by my pen.

No such material consideration, however, had any influence with me then, and I was fully content to teach in the schoolhouse four or five hours a day, if only during the rest of my time I could be allowed to do what I liked. What I liked just then was to write anonymous and gratuitous articles for one of the little Manx newspapers on religious and economic questions of the largest conceivable range. That was the moment when Ruskin started his "Guild of St. George," and rumours came to us of undergraduates digging the ground outside Oxford in pursuance of the principles which the master was propounding in his "Fors Clavigera." It was at this fire I lighted my torch, and for many months I went on writing denunciations of the social system and of the accepted interpretation of the Christian faith. Thus I was a Christian socialist a good many years before the name was known, and perhaps something of a New Theologian also. That my articles affected me profoundly I was perfectly sure, that they perplexed my uncle I had some grounds to fear, but that they made

so much as a ripple on the placid surface of Manx life I had no reason to believe. No reason, at least, except one, the fact that a humorous clergyman, who must have got a "scoot" into my anonymity, and discovered the compromising name of the boyish scribbler who was undertaking the defence of the rights of man, preached a sermon by way of reply to my socialism on the text, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Meantime my uncle died, and in some informal way I took up his place as schoolmaster, with all the extraneous duties that pertained to it, such as the making of wills for farmers round about, the drafting of agreements and leases, the writing of messages to banks protesting against crushing interest, and occasionally the inditing of love letters for young farm hands to their girls in service on farms that were far away. It was all grist that came to my mill, and it never troubled me a ha'po'th that I got "nothing out of anything," not even my schoolmastering, which was not all cakes and ale.

The schoolhouse was a quaint-looking structure that stood alone like a lighthouse on the bleakest of the Manx headlands, Kirk Maughold Head, and the wind in winter swirled

MAUGHOLD CHURCH, ISLE OF MAN.

round it and lashed it as with a knout, and once a seagull, driven helpless before the fury of a storm, came crashing through a window-pane. Sometimes we had to tie a rope from the door of the dwelling-house to the door of the school that I might shoulder my way round by the walls without being swept off my feet, and sometimes we saw the children, who came from the farms in the valleys on either side, with laughter and shrill cries, creeping up to our aerie on hands and knees. It was a stern sort of schooling for all of us, but I think we came through it to our mutual content, though the children taught me more than I was able to teach them, and I have since put some of them into my books.

I must have been there for the better part of a year, and during that time the little schoolmaster was in his way a sort of centre of intellectual life. For the dark nights we got up penny readings and debates, and perhaps if it were quite worth while I could tell of wondrous speeches by my friend Billy Corkill and others on such perilous subjects as "Early or late marriage—which is best?" It was not all of our Manx folk who could shine in debate, but it was astonishing how many attempted to practise it, and I recall with a pang some of

the efforts of my neighbours at public speaking on delicate questions, for they were tragically outspoken as orators.

But this, too, was all grist to my mill, being a sort of public confessional to which I had beguiled my unsuspecting countrymen, though there was a side of my own life which they could not share. That was the side that concerned books, other books than they kept on the "lath" (the ceiling shelf in the kitchen), the Bible and "Pilgrim's Progress," and "Clarke's Commentary," and "The Land and the Book"—books that might have shocked that Puritan sense which they did not yet know as "the Nonconformist conscience," books of poetry and even fiction, or perhaps drama, whose authors (as an unforgiving Manx Methodist afterward said of me) "made their living by telling lies."

One such book whereof rumour came to me in those days was the first of Rossetti's volumes of poems, just published, and being greatly reviewed, but I recall no more of the impression it made upon me than the effect of the tragic story of how the original manuscript had been buried with the coffin of the poet's wife, and then exhumed after lying seven years in the grave. I remember that a thrill came first with

that story, and then, close behind it, a certain sense of outrage, as if the grace of great renunciation had been finally thrown away.

Such was my first point of touch with a man whose friendship was in later years to play so large a part in my life; such, too, were my scene and my interests when one day a letter came to me on my bleak headland that sent me back to Liverpool within a week. It was from my master, the architect, and it said:

"Why on earth are you wasting your life over there? Come back to your proper work at once."

I had certainly run away without completing my apprenticeship, but I really believe he was one of those who cherished the delusion that I might become a great architect.

CHAPTER III

MY FIRST LITERARY FRIENDS

THE only terms I attempted to make with the expectations of my friends were those of writing articles on architectural subjects for the professional journals. This I began to do immediately after my return to Liverpool, and kept it up for a considerable period, so that stowed away somewhere in *The Builder* and *The Building News* there must be a number of essays in architectural criticism written by me in my youthful days at the drawing-board. They were distinctly transcendental, I remember, and never very practical, and this was probably the reason my inexperience was not detected.

It was about the time when Ruskin was quite rightly raising a loud outcry against the restoration of ancient buildings, and my articles were, I think, for the most part intended to support him in his propaganda. I know they were written in a style that was a far-away

imitation of the great critic's earlier manner, being very florid, even flamboyant, full of passionate appeals for the reverent treatment of decaying monuments, and fierce denunciations of the great people who were then falsifying history as it was written in our stones. My articles were sincere enough, I think, and, thanks to their model, they were not too manifestly immature, for Ruskin himself took notice of them and wrote to me more than once in words of sufficient encouragement. His letters, if I could find them all, would, I think, be interesting for what they reveal of the man, apart from his subject, for they were written at that period of storm and stress when his tempestuous brain was swinging to and fro, before it finally went down to that still and vacant air in which it lingered so long. In one of them, which I have recovered, Ruskin speaks of "a bad fit of weariness, not to say worse," which has kept him from fulfilling some promise he had made me, and adds, "I am sincerely glad and grateful for all you tell me of your work." In another he says:

"I have of course the deepest interest in your work—and *for that reason* must keep wholly out of it.

"I should drive myself mad again in a week if I thought of such things.

"I am doing botany and geology, and you, who are able for it, must fight with rascals and fools. I will be no more plagued by them."

Again, apparently on the same subject, he says:

"I am entirely hopeless of any good whatever against these devilish modern powers and fashions. My words choke me if I try to speak.

"I know nothing of Liverpool, and what can I say there, but that it has first to look after its poor, and the churches will take care of themselves."

I remember that I had other letters from Ruskin at this period, some of them written from Coniston, and some from Venice in the full blast of the torrential wrath in which his great brain finally disappeared; but the most immediate, if not the most practical, reward I received for my articles came to me from another source. The editor of one of my architectural journals, George Godwin, I think, wrote to say that he would be glad if I would go up to see him in London.

The perturbation created by this message was increased by the rumour, whispered to me by an architect friend, that Godwin, who was

growing old, was on the lookout for an assistant editor, who might perhaps succeed him some day at the office of *The Builder*. The prospect was glorious, but there was a lion in the way, and no one could be so much in fear of it as myself. It was before the days when men were "too old at forty," and I had David Copperfield's dread of being too young. I had suffered from that malady for a considerable time, and as often as I had had to tell my age I had inwardly asked forgiveness and then added a year to it, being only restrained from adding more by the certainty that my face, which was ridiculously youthful, would betray and convict me.

I obeyed the editor's order, and went up to see him at his private house in London, but I shall never forget my miserable sense of being so young when I was shown into a drawing-room full of historic chairs, or the shiver that passed over me as the old man entered and looked at me for the first time. It seemed to me that for a moment his eyes were starting out of his head, and he was asking himself if it could be possible that he had inflicted upon the mature readers of his staid editorial columns the effusions of this boy who was not much more to look at than a girl.

Fortunately for himself the editor did not ask me to become his assistant editor, and perhaps that (after the breakdown of the Gladstone stewardship) was the luckiest chance, and the narrowest escape, that ever happened to me in my life. In the making of imaginative literature it is the rolling stone that gathers the moss, and my stone was not yet done rolling.

Partly from the failure of faith in myself as a draughtsman, and partly from a desire to be moving on, I left my architect and became assistant to a builder. That was for me the best move I had yet made, though I remember with a certain shame that it must have been considerably less advantageous to my employer, for my new employment fostered my literary activity after a fashion that could hardly have been contemplated by my indulgent chief. Making no particular demand on my intellect, it left me free to read more and more books of many sorts, and to write stories and dramas and essays and articles. I remember that I had a snug little office to myself in which I did these things for several years, while all the time my face bore an expression of intense absorption in the affairs of the building trade. The literary conscience in its early manifestations is an elastic conscience.

My building employment brought me something even better than leisure for my amateur literary efforts—it put me into touch with men. I was in daily communication with one or two hundred of them of various trades and classes for at least five years, so it was my own fault if I did not learn something of the working man. I learned a good deal about him, both on his good side and his bad side, about his thrift and his improvidence, his industry and his malingering, his frequent self-sacrifice for his family and his drunken indifference to the cries of his children, his simple natural manners, as of a born gentleman, and his frequent foulness of speech, as of a low brute. It would not be entirely safe to say that what I saw of the working man at close quarters did not tend to modify the more uncompromising side of my militant socialism, but better than any knowledge which my building experience brought me of the working man, as such, was the daily sight of the inside of life which came by giving "subs" to meet the expenses of sickness at home that was sometimes real and sometimes imaginary, and even of funerals which were occasionally faked. Like my Manx experience, it was all grist to my mill, and I was unconsciously filling a big granary which

I have never since been able to empty, though I have made calls upon it many times.

Meantime, with the help of friend Tirebuck and others, I was making various grandiose efforts in Liverpool, and one of these was an effort to establish a branch of the Shakespeare Society, the Ruskin Society, and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, all rolled into one. We called our own organisation "Notes and Queries Society," held our meetings at the local Royal Institution, and invited public men to discourse to us in person or by proxy. The "Notes" were often provided by persons of no less distinction than Ruskin and William Morris, but the only "Queries" I can remember came from our landlords, and concerned the subject of rent. Henry Irving, then a young man in the first flush of his success, came to us on one occasion to defend what was called his "craven" view of "Macbeth," and I remember that much to his amusement a rugged Unitarian minister, who had been, I think, a postman, dressed him down as if he had been a naughty boy who required the cane of a schoolmaster.

The local dignitaries gave us occasionally the light of their countenance. Philip Rathbone told us stark naked truths about the

"nude in art," and Edward Russell read to us, I think, one of his masterly essays on Shakespeare. There were, too, a good many young Liverpool men in the enterprise, and though "Notes and Queries" eventually subsided, a few of us emerged. One became known to the public as a poet (I think a great one), another as a politician, a third as a preacher, and two of us as writers of tales.

I was in my early twenties by this time, and in spite of many discouragements life was full of great dreams. Among them was one which brought me back to the great writer and painter, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was to fill so large a space in my succeeding years. Through a member of our society, a journalist of much ability, Ashcroft Noble, I came to know a young poet who has since attained to a high and well-deserved renown. He was a boy of seventeen or eighteen at that time, very slight and pale, very modest and reticent, and reminding us constantly of Keats, not alone by his spiritual gifts, but also his physical infirmities, for he was very delicate then, and we feared he would die of decline. This was William Watson, the son of a merchant in Liverpool, and he had written a long romantic poem which we believed to be full of genius. I re-

member that unlike the rest of us he had never been to business, and that his father, partly out of regard for his health, and partly, I think, on the recommendation of Edward Dowden, of Dublin University, had left him free to follow, if he wished to do so, the profession of literature.

Both Watson and Noble were at that period enthusiastic admirers of Rossetti, both as a poet and as a painter, and through them I revived my interest in the subject of the grim story of the buried book which had so deeply impressed me in the Isle of Man. I heard of Rossetti through other channels also, for through "Notes and Queries" I had come to know Hawthorne's friend, H. A. Bright, and through him the late Lord Houghton.

I remember Bright as a frail, sensitive man with eager eyes, who read aloud to me with the appearance of one who is passing delicious wine over his palate, the choicest passages from Hawthorne's letters; and I recall Lord Houghton chiefly by his story of how he came to write his life of Keats. When very young (he was then very old) he had set off for Italy in order to work up material for a life of Shelley, and, putting up for a day or two at Florence, he had called on Walter Savage Landor.

Landor, for some reason, threw cold water on Houghton's enthusiasm, and then said:

"But a young fellow named Keats died at Rome a while ago, and he was a real poet—why not get up a life of *him*?"

Bright had known something of Rossetti, and in reply to my eager questioning, which was not to be satisfied without personal details, he told me that the poet was a little dark man with fine eyes under a broad brow—a little Italian, in short. I think it was Lord Houghton who said Rossetti, in the days when he used to meet him (probably at Mrs. Gaskell's), was a young fellow of strong Bohemian habits (meaning thereby, I presumed, a certain tendency to recklessness or even indecorum), known at that time principally as a painter and the leader of an eccentric school of art, but also as a poet whose poems, not yet published as a whole, were much belauded by a narrow circle in which they passed from hand to hand.

I also recall, as one of the fountains from which I quenched my thirst for any sort of *ana* relating to Rossetti, that on a holiday in the Lake Country I met a stranger whom I thought I recognised as the author of "Festus," and that with much akin to the foregoing

I also heard from him that in his young manhood the poet's manners had been, to say the least, robustious, suggesting a person in deliberate revolt against nearly all the conventions of society, and delighting, if only out of perversity or for devilish amusement, in every opportunity to startle well-ordered people out of their propriety by championing the worst view of Neronian Rome, and to silence by sheer vehemence of denunciation the seemly protests of very good and very gentle folk.

But more arresting because obviously of more serious import than such pictures of the excesses of a vigorous physical and intellectual youth, were the slight peeps I was able to get from Bright, Houghton, and others of the life the poet lived then. It appeared that Rossetti had long been living in the strictest seclusion in a large house in Chelsea, which had once been the home of the Princess Elizabeth; that neither the literary nor the artistic society of London saw anything of him; that his face was unknown to the pictorial newspapers, and unfamiliar to his contemporaries in either of the two arts in which he was now illustrious; that outside a close and very limited circle he was as one who was dead and buried, save for the splendid achievements in poetry and paint-

ing which emerged at intervals from the sealed doors of his tomb.

It was natural that about an existence so shrouded by mystery various myths should have gathered, and in reply to my questioning I received a number of fragmentary romances, some of them having, as I now see, a certain substratum of truth. Thus I was told that Rossetti's seclusion had been due to the shock occasioned by the death of his wife, and again to the remorse that had followed on having allowed himself to exhume her body for the recovery of the manuscripts which he had buried in her grave, and yet again to the distress and sense of degradation which had resulted upon the adverse criticism of a brother poet, taken up by a whole pack of critical hounds in full cry.

Such were the portraits of Rossetti with which I fed my curiosity in those early days in Liverpool, and the first outcome of my enthusiasm was a lecture which I delivered at the local Free Library, when, "Notes and Queries" having subsided, the rolling stone was once more moving on. The text of that lecture I have long ago lost, but as it probably gave birth to the friendship which it will be my duty and pleasure to describe, I shall perhaps be doing

well to trust to my memory in an effort to indicate its drift.

I do not remember to have said anything about Rossetti the man, though that might have been a promising theme for a popular audience, neither did I attempt to tell the story of the origin and publication of his books, but I gave a narrative account of the stories of his greater poems, and then wound up with an abstract analysis of the impulses animating his work. In this analysis I argued that to place Rossetti among the "æsthetic" poets was an error of classification; that he had nothing in common with the Caliban of Browning, who worked "for work's sole sake"; that the topmost thing in him was indeed love of beauty, but the deepest thing was love of truth, often plain and uncomely truth; that the fusion of these two passions had at the same time softened the Italian Catholic, which I recognised as a leading element in him, and purified the Italian troubadour; that while he was too true an artist to follow art into its by-ways of moral significance and so cripple its broader aims, the absorption of the artist in his art seemed always to live and work together with the personal instincts of the man; that to do good on other grounds was in Rossetti's art

involved and included in being good on its own; that the manner of doing a thing could never be more than the part of a thing done, and that the most unmoral of all poetry, Poe's for example, involved many meanings, purposes, and results; that Rossetti's poetry showed how possible it was, without making conscious compromise with that Puritan principle of "doing good" of which Keats had been enamoured, to be unconsciously making for moral ends; and finally that there was a passive Puritanism in "Jenny" and in the most ardent of the sonnets which lived and worked together with the poet's artistic passion for doing his work supremely well.

I cannot but smile when I cast my mind back some thirty years and think of myself as a young fellow of five-and-twenty, full to the throat of the last phrase, not to say the last jargon, of the "higher" literary criticism, pouring out its abstract theories to an audience consisting chiefly of working men and women, who listened to me, I remember, in the most indulgent silence. But sure I am that some kindly Fate must have been directing my incongruous efforts, for knowing Rossetti's nature as I afterward learned to know it, I see that such pleading for the moral influences

animating his work was of all things most likely to enlist his sympathy and engage his affections. Smarting still under the monstrous accusation that he had by his poetry been engaged with others in an attempt to demoralise the public mind by the glorification of mere lust, he jumped with eagerness at a whole-hearted defence of his literary and human impulses, as a writer who had been prompted by the highest of spiritual emotions, and as a man to whom the passions of the body were as nothing unless sanctified by the concurrence of the soul.

My lecture was printed about a year after its delivery, and then eagerly but nervously, and I think modestly, I sent a copy of it to the poet, hardly expecting more than a word of response. A post or two later brought me, however, the following reply:

16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, 29 July, 1879.

Dear Mr. Caine: I am much struck by the generous enthusiasm displayed in your lecture, and by the ability with which it is written. Your estimate of the impulses influencing my poetry is such as I could wish it to suggest, and this suggestion, I believe, it will always have for a true-hearted nature. You say that you are grateful to me; my response is that I am grateful to you; for you have spoken up heartily and unfalteringly for the work you love.

I daresay you sometimes come to London. I should be very glad to know you, and would ask you, if you thought of calling, to give me a day's notice when to expect you, as I am not always able to see visitors without appointment. The afternoon about 5 might suit you, or else the evening about 9.30.

With all best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

D. G. ROSSETTI.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEGINNING OF A GREAT FRIENDSHIP

IF the foregoing letter seems to the reader to be little more than a courteous acknowledgment by a famous poet of an appreciative criticism sent by a stranger, I must urge that in order to realise what it meant to me it is necessary to think of who and what I was, as (for this purpose chiefly) I have tried to show myself in the foregoing story—a young man in the country who had begun life in the most unlikely of all conditions for the pursuit of the literary calling, who had scratched and scrambled through a kind of miscellaneous education, Heaven knows how, who had made efforts to emerge from an environment for which he was quite unfit, and thus far failed in all of them. To this raw and untutored beginner, quite unrecognised and unknown, a great man, illustrious in two arts, in return for a little essay, a mere lecture delivered in a provincial city to an audience whose opinion could have no

sensible effect on his fame, held out his hand and said, at a moment perhaps of deep discouragement, "I should be very glad to know you." Is it a matter for much surprise that the day I received that first letter from Rossetti seemed to me to be the greatest day of my life?

I think it not improbable that my reply sufficiently expressed the emotion I describe, for the poet wrote to me again and again within a very few days, with a warmth and tenderness which I still feel to be, under the circumstances of the great disparity between us, both as to age and gifts and condition, almost inexpressibly touching.

"My dear Caine," he wrote, after a while, "let me assure you at once that correspondence with yourself is one of my best pleasures, and that you cannot write too much or too often for *me*; though after what you have told me as to the apportioning of your time [I had to be at my office at six in the morning in those days] I would be unwilling to encroach unduly upon it. Neither should I on my side prove very tardy in reply, as you are one to whom I find there is something to say when I sit down with a pen and paper. I have a good deal of enforced evening leisure, as it is seldom I can paint or draw by gas light. It would

not be right in me to refrain from saying that to meet with one so 'leal and true' to myself as you are has been a consolation amid much discouragement.

"Do please drop the 'Mr.' in writing to me again."

Thus far Rossetti knew nothing more about me than I have indicated in this narrative, but he was naturally curious to learn something about his correspondent; in those early days he put pointed questions occasionally.

"Some one to whom I showed your article," he wrote, "would insist, from the last paragraph, that you must be a Roman Catholic. Is this the case? Pardon my putting the query, as I perceive rather abruptly."

On this hint I wrote freely enough, apparently, and he replied:

"I am truly delighted to hear how young you are: I suppose you are not married. In original work a man does some of his best things by your time of life, though he only finds it out in a rage much later, at some date when he expected to know no longer that he had ever done them. Keats hardly died so much too early—not at all if there had been any danger of his taking to the modern habit eventually—treating material as product, and

shooting it all out as it comes. Of course, however, he wouldn't; he was getting always choicer and simpler; my favourite piece in his works is 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'—I suppose about his last. As to Shelley, it is really a mercy that he has not been hatching yearly universes till now. He might, I suppose, for his friend Trelawney still walks the earth, without greatcoat, stockings, or under clothing this Xmas. [1879.]

"In criticism matters are very different as to the seasons of production, though you have done work already that should honour you yet. Nothing strikes me about you to better purpose than your simple lucidity where that alone is wanted, as in the lecture you sent me.

"I am writing hurriedly and horridly in every sense. Write again and I'll try and answer better. All greetings to you."

Again, he wrote: "The comparative dates of our births are curious. (I myself was born on old May day ['12'] in the year [1828] after that in which Blake died). You were born, in fact, just as I was giving up poetry at about 25, on finding that it impeded attention to what constituted another aim and a livelihood into the bargain, i. e., painting. From that date up to the year when I published my poems, I

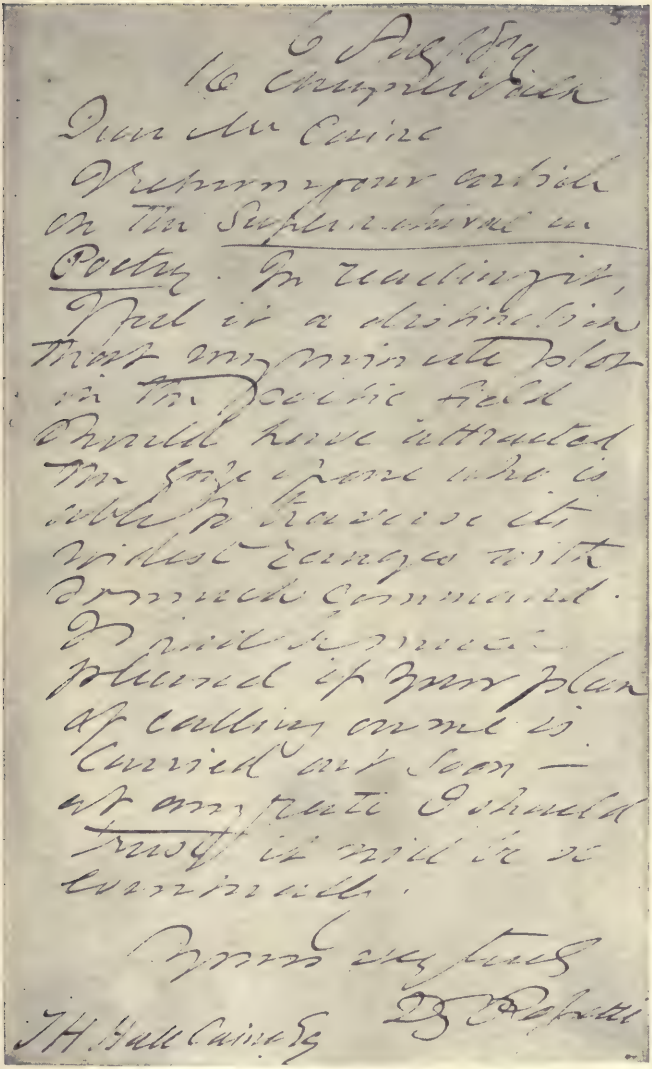
wrote extremely little. I might almost say nothing, except the renovated 'Jenny' in 1858 or '59. To this again I added a passage or two when publishing in 1870."

My employment in Liverpool delayed for many months the moment when I was to meet Rossetti in London, but our intimacy deepened by correspondence and he began to send me some of the shorter poems which he had not yet published, and to ask me to show him such work as I had done myself.

"Tell me what you think of my things," he said. "All you said in your letter of this morning was very grateful to me. I have a fair amount by me in the way of later MS. which I may show some day when we meet. Meantime I feel that your energies are already in full swing—work coming on the heels of work—and that your time cannot be long delayed as regards your place as a writer. Do you write poetry? I should think you must surely do so."

In replies to inquiries like this I was naturally very eager to show what I had done, so I sent poetry, criticism, prose narrative, and, I think, fragments of drama, most of it unpublished and some of it never to see print.

"I return your article on the 'Supernatural



A Letter from Rossetti.

in Poetry,'" he said. "In reading it I feel it a distinction that my minute plot in the poetic field should have attracted the gaze of one who is able to traverse its widest ranges with so much command. I shall be much pleased if the plan of calling on me is carried out soon—at any rate I trust it will be so eventually.

"I have been reading again your article on the 'Supernatural.' It is truly admirable—such work must soon make you a place. The dramatic paper [it was a pamphlet on Henry Irving's *Macbeth*] I thought suffered from some immaturity—moreover, if I were you, I should eschew modern dramatic matters."

"I perceive," he wrote playfully, "you have had a complete poetic career which you have left behind to strike out into wider waters! The passage on 'Night,' which you say was written under the planet Shelley, seems to me (and to my brother, to whom I read it) to savour more of the 'mortal moon'—that is of a weird and sombre Elizabethanism, of which Beddoes may be considered the modern representative. But we both think it has an unmistakable force and value; and if you can write better poetry than this, let your angel say unto you, *Write.*"

But Rossetti's critical indulgence of the

youngest of poetasters did not forbid the expression of a frank opinion. "You may be sure," he said, "I do not mean essential discouragement when I say that full as 'Nell' is of reality and pathos, your swing of arm seems to me firmer and freer in prose than in verse. You know already how high I rate your future career (short of the incalculable storms of Fate), but I do think I see your field to lie chiefly in the noble achievements of fervid and impassioned prose. . . . I thought the passage on 'Night' showed an aptitude for choice imagery. I should much like to see something which you view as your best poetic effort hitherto. After all there is no need that every gifted writer should take the path of poetry. I am confident in your preference for frankness on my part."

While the hampering conditions of my employment delayed our coming together, Rossetti showed a good deal of friendly anxiety to bring me into contact with such of his friends as were near to Liverpool or had occasion to visit it. In this way I met Madox Brown, and sat to him for one of the figures in his admirable frescoes in the Town Hall at Manchester, and in this way, too, I met Stephens, the art critic.

"I am very glad you were welcomed by dear stanch Stephens, as I felt sure you would be. He is one of my oldest and best friends, of whom few can be numbered at my age, from causes only too varying.

> "Go from me, summer friends, and tarry not—
> I am no summer friend, but wintry cold.

"So be it, as needs must be—not for all, let us hope, and not *with* all, as good Stephens shows. I have not seen him since his return. I wrote him a line to thank him for his friendly reception of you, and he wrote in return to thank *me* for your acquaintance, and spoke very pleasantly of you. Your youth seems to have surprised him. . . . You mention something he said to you of me and my surroundings. They are certainly *quiet* enough as far as retirement goes, and I have often thought I should enjoy the presence of a congenial and intellectual house-fellow and board-fellow in this big barn of mine, which is actually going to rack and ruin for want of use. But where to find the welcome, the willing, and the able combined in one? . . . Your letter holds out the welcome probability of meeting you here ere long."

This note of his loneliness was only too in-

sistent in his earlier letters. "I am sometimes very solitary," he said, "and then letter writing brings solace, when one addresses so young and hopeful a well-wisher as yourself. Accordingly I sit down to-night to answer your last letter."

My health failed me for a time, and though Rossetti and I had not even yet seen each other face to face, his anxiety about my condition could not have been greater had I been his own son.

"You are very young to be so beset with dark moods," he said, "and I am much concerned to hear it. Every one, I suppose, thinks *he* only knows the full bitterness of the Shadowed Valley. I hope health is whole with you —then all *must* come out well, with your mind and such energy as yours to make its way.

"It is very late. Good-bye for to-night."

Such were the earliest of the letters which formed the beginnings of my first great literary friendship, and if I have permitted myself to transcribe the too generous words of one whose personal affections may have been already engaged, I have no fear of misconception on the part of right-minded readers, and shall not count as so much as the ghost of a flea the soul of the critic who concludes that I

have quoted these passages in order to show how in my youth a great man praised me. I have quoted them because I believe they illustrate, as hardly anything else can, the sweetest and most intimate if not the highest and noblest side of Rossetti's nature—that side, namely, which showed his capacity for the most disinterested friendship. And when I think of the traffic which too often goes by that name, the miserable commerce of give and take, the little-hearted barter in which self-love usually counts on being the gainer, I cannot but think that in letters like these, to an unknown beginner, Rossetti shows that with his other gifts he had the very genius of friendship itself.

Not to me only, as I now know, did he show sympathy and unselfishness, for the stories are not few or rare of how he gave his time and energies, and even in some cases sacrificed a little of his personal aims and ambitions, in order to forward the interests of his friends, but I think there was something exceptional in the friendship he gave to me. If he lived a solitary life in those days it was not because he might not have found society enough among importunate admirers round about him, who would have been only too eager to give him

their company at the faintest hint or wink; but outside the narrow circle of intimate comrades he selected for his friend a young fellow in the country, half his age, who could bring him nothing but sympathy, and counted for so very little in a world in which he counted for so much.

I am not ashamed to say there are tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat when I read again in Rossetti's letters of the long evenings in his studio, when it was impossible for him to paint or draw by gas light, and his loneliness was broken by writing to me, for I know that, but for the unselfishness with which in this way he gave me so many hours of his silent company, and but for the encouragement, the strength, and self-sacrifice he brought me, it would have taken me long to emerge from the commonplace round of daily life. Not that I was in any sense an object of pity, for I was no poor little drudge in a blacking warehouse, but, on the contrary, a much-indulged servant of an employer who had made me his friend; but all the time I was a clerk in the lower middle class of provincial life, and that is perhaps the wheel of life from which it is hardest of all to escape.

That I escaped from it at all was perhaps

chiefly due to the generous extravagance with which Rossetti told me, in so many ways, that my "time could not be long delayed," and that in spite of the dark moods "all *must* come out well." There was not much to justify such bold predictions then, and when, years afterward, on the publication of the first of my Manx novels, Rossetti's brother William said, "After all Gabriel knew what he was doing," I was more moved by that than by many favourable articles, and since then, if I have spent countless precious hours reading the efforts of beginners and struggling to say good words of them, it has been only by way of balancing my reckoning with one who, in my early and dark days, did so much for me.

The correspondence from which I have quoted some pages went on without interruption for something more than a year, and during that time there was not, I suppose, a single day in which I did not either receive a letter from Rossetti or write to him. What my own letters were like I cannot any longer recall, nor is it necessary to remember, but Rossetti's letters, which were sometimes very long, being of six, eight, twelve, and even sixteen pages, constitute perhaps a larger body of writing than all his published compositions put together. It

will therefore be a matter for no surprise that from that time forward, for several years to come, my life was my friendship with Rossetti.

I shall try in the next section of this book to tell the story of that friendship, the greatest, the most intimate, the most beautiful that has ever come to me. In order to do so I must begin by giving an account of Rossetti's life before I knew him, and if this proves to be a thrice-told tale I can at least promise that it will be brief.

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF MY FRIEND'S LIFE

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI (baptised Gabriel Charles Dante) was the eldest son of Gabriele Rossetti, a patriotic poet exiled from the Abruzzi, and of Frances Polidori, a daughter of Alfieri's secretary and a sister of the young doctor who travelled with Lord Byron.

Gabriel (the name by which his family always knew him) was born, as he had told me, on old May Day, the 12th of 1828, in Charlotte Street, Portland Place. He had one brother, William Michael, and two sisters, Christina and Maria.

The elder Rossetti's house was, as long as he lived, the constant resort of Italian refugees, from which I judge that though he did not live to see the returning glories of his country, he remained true to the last to the principles for which he had fought and suffered; but I do not gather that any of his children, least of all his

eldest son, felt any call of blood to participate actively in the struggles of Italy. From the beginning to the end Rossetti was, I think, an absolute Englishman.

The home of the Italian exile in London appears to have been that of a poor scholar, and among the consequences of this condition was the inevitable one that his children were brought up in an atmosphere of culture, and that his sons had to seek their own livelihood as soon as possible. After a few years at King's College School, Rossetti studied at the Royal Academy Antique School, and he appears to have been a fairly assiduous student. I remember that in later years when his habit of late rising was a stock subject of banter between us, he told me with pride that at this period he would rise at six in the morning once a week to attend a life class and breakfast on a buttered roll and a cup of coffee at a stall at a street corner, so as not to disturb the domestic arrangements by requiring the servants to get up in the middle of the night.

So far as I can gather he did not exercise the self-denial very long, for he left the family roof after a few years and, in the interests of his studies, pitched his tent with certain of his artist friends. These were Millais, Holman

Hunt, Wolner, Deverell, Stephens, and above all Madox Brown. With some of this group of associates while he was still under age he started an art movement, to which half in jest he gave the name of Pre-Raphaelitism.

The group of young artists calling themselves Pre-Raphaelites had begun to exhibit, to attract attention, to excite discussion and provoke censure, when Ruskin, already a great light in art criticism, came to the rescue of the little brotherhood by writing a letter in their defence in the *Times,* and thus placed their movement in the category of serious efforts.

From early days Rossetti had written poetry, and it is clear from a letter already quoted that many of his most admired poems were the work of his first twenty-five years. Some of the best, showing marked originality of manner and substance, were obviously the product of his minority; and were accepted side by side with Pre-Raphaelitism in art, as manifestations of Pre-Raphaelitism in literature. A magazine called *The Germ* was started to illustrate the new ideas, and later, in a kind of semi-affiliated way, came a kindred magazine, called *The Oxford and Cambridge.* Beyond contributing a few of his poems, however, to these periodicals, Rossetti made little or no attempt to

publish his poetry, which nevertheless acquired a kind of subterranean reputation among his private friends.

His personal character in these days of early manhood is described as generous and genial, but, also, a little masterful. He was admittedly the king of his circle, and I fear it must be said that in all that constituted kingship he took care to rule.

Rossetti was never in any distinct sense a humourist, but there came to him at this period those outbursts of high spirits which act as safety-valves to serious natures. At such times he appears to have plunged into any mad-cap escapade that might be afoot with complete heedlessness of consequences. Stories of misadventures, quips and quiddities of every kind were then his delight, and he was by no means above the innocent ruffianism of the practical joke.

But, midway between the twenties and the thirties, there came into his life an event that was to touch the deepest side of his nature. One day his friend Deverell, going with his mother into a milliner's shop in Oxford Street, saw through an open door a number of young girls at work in an inner room. Among the girls was one who had the most glorious mass

of reddish auburn hair, and as this was then the favourite Pre-Raphaelite colour, Deverell's interest was excited in a moment, and he whispered to his mother, "Ask that girl with the red hair if she will sit to me." After some hesitation Mrs. Deverell did so, and on this chance hung the beginning of what is perhaps the most tragic series of incidents in modern literary life.

The girl sat as a model to Deverell, and through him to Rossetti also. Her name was Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall, and she was the daughter of a singer at one of the dissenting chapels. Father and daughter had lately come from Sheffield, where certain records of them are still preserved. The girl was young and beautiful, clever also in various ways, and she presently revealed a very marked aptitude for art. She became known to all the young artists of the Rossetti circle, and Ruskin appears to have taken a peculiar interest in her. It is said that to enable her to liberate herself from the thraldom of her menial occupation, yet not to wound her pride, the great critic, who was rich, offered to buy all the pictures she could paint, on condition that she should become a pupil of Rossetti. There appears to have been no difficulty about this, for the painter's inter-

est in his young model had speedily ripened into love. In due course Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddall became engaged.

The young girl must have been a very remarkable creature. Her face, as Rossetti painted it, shows intellect and sensibility in a high degree, but a certain tendency to sadness. People who remember her, however, speak of her as cheerful and bright, if not vivacious, in that spring-time of her youth.

They seem to have been happy in those early days, painting together, reading together, and even writing together, for the girl developed under Rossetti's tuition not only a wonderful eye for colour and an astonishing power of composition, but also a real appreciation of the higher poetic literature and a capacity for producing it; while he, too, as we may plainly see without other knowledge than the internal evidences of his work, produced some of the most pure and perfect of his poems under the impulse of her presence and the inspiration of his first great love.

Then came a separation, and it is not easy for me to say what it was due to, so conflicting are the stories of those who claim to know. I have heard that, beautiful and brilliant as Elizabeth Siddall was, she was not (as is nat-

ural) in the conventional sense an educated woman, and that at her own suggestion and by Rossetti's help she went away to school. I have also heard that at a moment of some difference Ruskin again interposed, with certain delicate overtures, which enabled her to return for further study to her native place. At all events, she left London and was away for a considerable time.

Meantime, Rossetti, giving up poetry on finding, as he says, that it "impeded attention to what constituted another aim and a livelihood into the bargain," devoted himself entirely to his painting. At twenty-eight he undertook, with two or three other young painters, to cover with frescoes the walls of Union Debating Hall at Oxford, and while engaged upon this task he made the acquaintance of a group of undergraduates, with whose name his own name has ever since been associated—Burne-Jones, Swinburne, and William Morris, as well as one other who proved to be among the strongest, purest, and most lasting influences upon his life, the lady, herself a model at the beginning, who afterward became his friend Morris's wife.

What effect these new friendships, any or all of them, may have had on the relation in

which he still stood to Elizabeth Siddall, it would perhaps be hard to say, but I think evidences are not wanting in the poems written about this period of a new and disturbing element, a painful and even tragic awakening, a sense of a great passion coming too late, and above all of a struggle between love and duty which augured less than well for the happiness of the marriage that was to come.

But Elizabeth Siddall returned to London, and Rossetti and she were married. Friends who saw much of them in earlier days of their married life speak of their obvious happiness, and protest, in particular, against evil rumours circulated later, that nothing could have been more marked than Rossetti's zealous attentions to his young wife. All the same, it is true that very soon her spirits drooped, her art was laid aside, and much of the cheerfulness of home was lost to both of them. Her health failed, she suffered from neuralgia, and began to be a victim of nervous ailments of other kinds.

To allay her sufferings she took laudanum, at first in small doses, but afterward in excess. A child came, but it was still-born, and then her mood, already sad, appears to have deepened to one of settled melancholy. I remember to have heard Madox Brown say that

she would sit for long hours with her feet inside the fender looking fixedly into the fire. It is easy to believe that to a man so impressionable as Rossetti, so dependent on cheerful surroundings, so liable to dark moods of his own, this must have been a condition which made home hard to bear. If he escaped from it as often as possible, it is perhaps only natural, and it is no less natural if his absence was misunderstood. I express no opinion, but the facts appear to point that way.

They were living in rooms in Chatham Place by the old Blackfriars Bridge, and one evening, about half-past six, being invited to dine with friends at an hotel in Leicester Square, they got into a carriage to go. It had been a bad day for the young wife, and they had hardly reached the Strand when her nervousness became distressing to Rossetti, and he wished her to return. She was unwilling to do so, and they went on to their appointment, but it may be assumed that her condition did not improve, for at eight o'clock they were back at home.

Soon after that Rossetti left his wife preparing to retire for the night, and went out again apparently to walk. When he returned at half-past eleven he found his rooms full of a strong odour of laudanum, his wife breathing

stertorously and lying unconscious on the bed. He called a doctor, who saw at once, what was only too obvious, that the lady had taken an overdose of her accustomed sleeping draught. Other doctors were summoned, and every effort was made to save the patient's life, but after lingering several hours without recovering consciousness for a moment, and therefore without offering a word of explanation, toward seven o'clock in the morning she died.

Next day an inquest was held at which Rossetti, though stunned and stupefied, had to give the evidence which is summarised in the foregoing statement. There had been no reason why his wife should wilfully take her own life; quite the contrary; and when he left her about nine o'clock she seemed more at ease. The verdict was "accidental death." The proceedings of the coroner's court were reported in a short paragraph in one only of the London papers, and there the poet's name was wrongly spelled.

This was in 1862, no more than two years after the marriage that had been waited for so long. The blow to Rossetti was a terrible one. It was some days before he seemed to realise fully the loss that had befallen him, but after that his grief knew no bounds, and it first expressed itself in a way that was full of the

tragic grace and beauty of a great renunciation.

Many of his poems had been, as I have said, inspired by and addressed to his wife, and at her request he had copied them out, sometimes from memory, into a little book which she had given to him for this purpose. With this book in his hand, on the day of her funeral, he walked into the room where her body lay, and quite unmindful of the presence of others, he spoke to his dead wife as though she could hear, saying the poems it contained had been written to her and for her and she must take them with her to the grave. With these words, or words to the same effect, he placed the little volume in the coffin by the side of his wife's face, and wrapped it round with her beautiful golden hair, and it was buried with her in Highgate Cemetery.

It was long before Rossetti recovered. Perhaps he was never the same man again. At least, the brilliant and perhaps rather noisy young fellow, fond of intellectual gymnastics and full of a sort of animal spirits, was gone for good, and though after a time he recovered a certain hilarity, there does not seem to have been much real joy in it. Not long after his wife's death he removed from Blackfriars

Bridge and made his home in the house already referred to, Queen's House, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea.

Before leaving his old quarters, he destroyed many things associated with his life there, among them being a great body of letters, some very valuable, from men and women eminent in literature and art—Ruskin, Tennyson, and Browning. Perhaps with the same view of cutting himself off from everything that was likely to remind him of his great loss, he separated himself from many of his former friends. It was of course the last course he ought to have taken, whether in the interests of his mental or bodily health, and the consequences of his isolation came only too quickly and lasted only too long.

Insomnia, that curse of the literary and artistic temperament, had been hanging about him for years, and now he began to try opiates. He took them in sparing quantities after the death of his wife, for had he not, in that fact alone, the most fearful cause to avoid their use? But presently he heard of the then newly found drug, chloral, which was of course accredited at the beginning with all the virtues and none of the vices of other known narcotics. Here, then, was the thing he wanted; this was

the blessed discovery that was to save him from days of weariness and nights of misery. Eagerly he procured it, took it nightly in small doses of ten grains each, and it gave him pleasant and refreshing sleep. He made no concealment of his habit; like Coleridge under similar circumstances, he rather elected to talk of it. Not yet had he learned the sad truth, too soon to force itself upon him, that this dreadful drug was an evil power with which he was to fight, almost down to his dying day, a single-handed and losing battle.

It was not, however, for some years after he began to use it that chloral produced any sensible effects of an injurious kind, and meantime he pursued his calling as a painter, making a substantial living and, though he never exhibited, an unmistakable reputation. After a while he amused himself, also, in furnishing his big house in various novel and beautiful styles, and in filling a big garden at the back with a veritable menagerie of birds and beasts. Life recovered a measure of interest for him in other directions also, if only as the shadowy ghost of the glad spirit of happier years, and Queen's House began to hum with the doings of friends old and new, Swinburne, Morris, Burne-Jones, for a short while Meredith, and of

course his ever constant and devoted brother, William.

Thus seven years passed, and during that time Rossetti, who frequently immersed himself in the aims and achievements of his friends, and witnessed their rise to fame and honour, began to think with pain of the aspirations as a poet which he had himself renounced, and to cast backward glances at the book he had buried in his wife's coffin. That book contained the only perfect copy of his poems, other copies being either incomplete or unrevised, and it is hardly to be wondered at that he asked himself at length if it could not be regained. The impulse of grief or regret, or even remorse, that had prompted him to the act of renunciation had been satisfied, and for seven years he had denied himself the reward of his best poetic effort—was not his penance at an end? It was doing no good to the dead to leave hidden in the grave the most beautiful works he had been able to produce—was it not his duty to the living, to himself, and perhaps even to God, to recover and publish them?

If in the daily sight of the growing reputation of younger men, his friends and comrades of no better genius, Rossetti began to be influenced by thoughts like these, without reflect-

ing that while it may have been an act of emotional weakness to bury his poems, it would be an act of desecration to take them up again. I set it down to the constant companionship at that period of a man of whom I shall have occasion to speak later on, a person out of another world altogether, a daring, reckless, unscrupulous soldier of fortune, very clever, very plausible, very persuasive, but totally destitute of delicate feeling and almost without the moral sense.

Under this man's direction the exhumation, when Rossetti had brought himself to agree to it, was eventually carried out. According to his own account, given to me twelve years afterward, the preparations were endless before the work could be begun. But at length the licence of the Home Secretary was obtained, the faculty of the Consistory Court was granted, and one night, seven and a half years after the burial, a fire was built by the side of the grave of Rossetti's wife in Highgate Cemetery, the grave was opened, the coffin was raised to the surface, and the buried book was removed.

I remember that I was told, with much else which it is unnecessary to repeat, that the body was apparently quite perfect on coming to the

light of the fire on the surface, and that when the book was lifted, there came away some of the beautiful golden hair in which Rossetti had entwined it.

While the painful work was being done, the unhappy author of it, now keenly alive to its gravity, and already torturing himself with the thought of it as a deed of sacrilege, was sitting alone, anxious and full of self-reproaches, at the house of the friend who had charge of it, until, later than midnight, he returned to say it was all over.

The volume was not much the worse for the years it had lain in the earth, but, nevertheless, it was found necessary to take it back to Rossetti that illegible words might be deciphered and deficiencies filled in. This was done, with what result of fresh distress can easily be imagined, and then with certain additions of subsequent sonnets the manuscript was complete. Under the simple title of "Poems," it was published in 1870, fifteen years after the greater part of it was produced, and when the author was forty-two.

The success of the book was immediate and immense, six or seven considerable editions being called for in rapid succession. Appearing in the same season as Disraeli's "Lothair,"

it ran, from the bookseller's standpoint, a neck-and-neck race with a political romance which owed much of its popularity to recognisable portraiture of living persons. It was reviewed with enthusiasm on nearly every side, and it was at once the literary sensation and the social event of the hour.

It would perhaps be difficult to assign to any single cause this extraordinary success of a book whose popular qualities were obviously inconsiderable, whether as Swinburne said in a noble essay full of splendid praise, to those innate qualities of beauty and strength which are always the first and last constituents of poetry that abides, or to the sudden explosion of the enthusiasm which had lived a subterranean life for so many years while the poems were in manuscript, or yet, as I think more probable, to the flick of interest and curiosity which came of a rumour of the book's romantic history, culminating in its burial for so many years in the grave of the woman whose love and beauty had inspired it.

Whatever the cause of the book's immediate success, there can be no doubt that Rossetti himself took great delight in it, and that in the first flush of his new-found happiness he began afresh with great vigour on poetic creation,

producing one of the most remarkable ballads of his second volume within a short time of the publication of the first. But then came a blow which arrested his energies and brought his literary activities to a long pause.

About a year after the appearance of the "Poems," an article was published in one of the most influential of the reviews, the *Contemporary,* which was in general a denunciation of the sensual tendencies of the age, in art, music, poetry, and the drama, and in particular an impeachment of the poetry of Rossetti, Swinburne, and William Morris, who were said to have "bound themselves into a solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art, to aver that poetic expression is better than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul and sound superior to sense."

The article, which was entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry," a name that was in itself an offence, suggesting the shambles and wounding the very sensibilities which it was supposed to defend, was undoubtedly written with great vigour, much knowledge of literature, and an immense power of popular appeal. It produced a sensible effect, awakening that moral

conscience which in the English people always slumbers, like the conventional lion, with one eye open, and being quickly followed by articles in the same spirit appearing in other reviews and newspapers of equal or yet greater standing.

On its publication in the *Contemporary*, the article bore the signature of "Thomas Maitland," but it afterward became known that the actual writer was Robert Buchanan, then a young author who had risen to considerable distinction as a poet.

Against Rossetti, as the latest and most universally acclaimed of poets, Buchanan's attack was especially directed, and while it may be freely admitted that there was actually present in some of the poetry assailed a tendency to deviate from wholesome reticence in dealing with human passion, and that to deify mere lust is an offence and an outrage, the sum total of all the poetry that was really reprehensible was probably less than one hundred lines, and therefore too inconsiderable to justify the charge made against its authors of an attempt to ruin society.

To say that Rossetti felt this charge is not to express his sense of it. He who had withheld his pictures from exhibition from dread

of the distracting influences of public opinion, he who for fifteen years had kept back his poems from print in obedience first to an extreme modesty of personal estimate, and afterward to the command of a mastering passion, was of all men the one most likely to feel deeply and incurably the wicked slander, born in the first instance of jealousy, that he had unpacked his bosom of unhealthy passions and demoralised the public mind.

If what Rossetti did, under this first fire of the enemy, seems weak and futile, let it be said that only those who know by experience what it is to have this foul accusation made against them, can have any idea of its distracting power. In the first moments of his indignation he wrote a full and point-by-point rejoinder, printed it as a pamphlet, and had a great number struck off, and then destroyed every copy. After that he wrote a temperate, but not very effectual, letter to the *Athenæum*, but finding that the accusations he rebutted were repeated immediately with increasing bitterness, he lost hope of stemming the tide of hostile criticism and announced his intention of abandoning poetic composition.

One by one some of the remaining friends of earlier years seemed now to have left him.

Whether, as I have heard certain of them say, they wearied a little of Rossetti's absorption in the critical attacks made upon him, thinking he put them out of proportion, or interpreted their origin and intention by a light that was scarcely consistent with sanity, or whether Rossetti, on his part (as one of the letters I have quoted appears to show), began to think of his old comrades as "summer friends," who fell away at the first breath of winter, the result was the same—he shut himself up in his big house in yet more absolute seclusion than before.

Nor did the mischief end there. The chloral, which he had first taken in small doses, he began now, in moments of physical prostration and nervous excitement, to indulge in to excess, and as a consequence he went through a series of terrible though intermittent illnesses, inducing a morbid condition, in which he was the victim of many painful delusions. Among them, as was perhaps natural, were some that related to the exhumation of his wife's body, and the curse that was supposed to have followed him for that desecration. This was an idea very liable to torment a mind so susceptible to supernatural suggestion as Rossetti's, and although one's soul cries out against a tor-

ture that was greater than any sins of his deserved, one cannot but welcome the thought that the seclusion to which he doomed himself, and the illness from which he suffered, were due to something more serious and more worthy of a man than the hostile article of a jealous fellow-poet.

Several years passed during which Rossetti lived in the closest retirement, seeing only the two or three friends who had always been with him, Madox Brown and his faithful and unfailing brother, William, and then light came, and he began in the fuller sense to live again. Letters and articles reached him from many quarters, from foreign countries and distant colonies, showing that adverse criticism had not quenched the light of his book. New friends came, too, to take the place of those who had gone "from causes only too varying," and unquestionably the first of these—the first in the confidence reposed in him and the affection felt for him—was Theodore Watts-Dunton, known at that time as Walter Theodore Watts, formerly a solicitor from Lincolnshire, and then the leader of the reviewing staff of the *Athenæum,* as well as a poet of considerable claim. Next to Watts, perhaps, among later friends came Frederic Shields, an artist from Man-

chester, whose power as a draughtsman and qualities as a man Rossetti held in high esteem. Others there were, too, such as Dr. Hake, himself a poet of some distinction, whose soothing friendship brought lasting solace, and finally there was myself, coming into Rossetti's life under the conditions I have described.

I am older myself at this time of writing than Rossetti was when I first knew him, and perhaps I can understand better now than I did then what interest I had for one who had twice my years. In default of the knowledge and the judgment that older friends could bring, and in spite of the difference of our education and gifts, I must have stood beside him like his youth, with its eagerness, its hopes, its dreams, its aspirations. This was just what was wanted at that period by the great man who had so lately come out of the Shadowed Valley, but was lonely enough yet, notwithstanding the frequent company of loyal comrades, to find comfort and cheer in the sympathy of a young and enthusiastic stranger.

He began to try his hand again at poetic composition, to send me some of his new poems and to write of others with a freedom and familiarity that were entirely flattering.

"I am just finishing a ballad on the Death of

James I. of Scotland. . . . It is a ripper, I can tell you, my boy."

It was clear that life was beginning to take a brighter outlook, and that he was preparing to publish again.

"Tell me what you think in reading my things. I have a fair amount by me in the way of later MS., which I may show you some day when we meet.

"I hope sincerely that we may have further and closer opportunities of intercourse. . . . I should welcome your advent in London warmly."

Such, then, was Rossetti when I first knew him, and during the earlier period of our correspondence, and now the time had come when I was to meet him face to face. There can be no necessity to describe the feelings with which I went forward to that first interview. Believing that my friend of twenty-five years ago has entered into the company of the immortals, and that a century hence everything will be of interest that gets close to him at any period, my portrait may perhaps exceed in details, but it shall not fail in fidelity.

I cannot, of course, claim for my picture that it will represent Rossetti as he was from first to last, or yet as he appeared to older friends,

who knew him through varying phases of his changeful career, but it shall at least be true to Rossetti as he appeared to me, twenty-five years his junior, and coming to him, full of admiration and affection, during the last years of his life.

CHAPTER II

MY FIRST MEETING WITH ROSSETTI

IT was in the autumn of 1880 that I saw Rossetti for the first time. Being somewhat reduced in health, I had contemplated a visit to one of the South-coast watering-places, and wrote saying that in passing through London I should like to avail myself of his oft-repeated invitation to visit him. By return of post came two letters, the one obviously written and posted within an hour or two of the other. In the first of these he said:

I will be truly glad to meet you when you come to town. You will recognise the hole-and-cornerest of all existences; but I'll read you a ballad or two, and have Brown's report to back my certainty of liking you.

In the second letter he said:

I would propose that you should dine with me on Monday at 8.30 and spend the evening. . . .

P. S.—Of course when I speak of your dining with me, I mean tête-à-tête and without ceremony of any kind. I usually dine in my studio and in my painting coat! D. G. R.

Cheyne Walk was unknown to me at the time of my first visit to Rossetti, except as the locality in which men and women eminent in literature were residing. It was not even then as picturesque as it appears to be in certain familiar engravings, for the embankment and the gardens that separated it from the main thoroughfare had already taken something from its quaint beauty, but it still possessed attractions which it has since lost, among them a look of age which contrasted agreeably with the spick-and-span newness of neighbouring districts, and the slumbrous atmosphere, as of a cathedral close, drowsing in the autumn sun to the murmur of the river which flowed in front, and the rustle of the trees which grew between.

Every foot of the old Walk was sacred ground to me then, for George Eliot, after her marriage with Mr. Cross, had lately come to No. 4; while at No. 5 in the second street to the westward Carlyle was still living, and a little beyond Cheyne Row stood the modest cottage wherein Turner died. Rossetti's house

was No. 16, and I found it answering in external appearance to the frank description he had given of it. It seemed to be the oldest house in the Walk, and the exceptional size of its gate piers and the height and weight of its gate and railings suggested to my eye, as an architect, that perhaps at some period it had stood alone, commanding as grounds a large part of the space occupied by the houses on either side.

The house itself was a plain Queen Anne erection, much mutilated by the introduction of unsightly bow windows, the brick work falling into decay, the paint in need of renewal, the windows dull with the dust of months, the sills bearing more than the suspicion of cobwebs, the angles of the steps to the porch and the untrodden flags of the little court leading up to them overgrown with moss and weed, while round the walls and up the reveals of door and windows were creeping the tangled branches of the wildest ivy that ever grew untouched by shears.

Such was the exterior of the house of the poet-painter when I walked up to it on the autumn evening of my earliest visit, and the interior of the house, when with trembling heart I first stepped over the threshold, seemed to be at once like and unlike the outside. The

hall had a puzzling look of equal nobility and shabbiness, for the floor was paved with white marble, which was partly covered by a strip of worn-out cocoa-nut matting. Three doors led out of the hall, one at each side and one in front, and two corridors opened into it, but there was no sign of a staircase, and neither was there any daylight, except the little that was borrowed from a fanlight which looked into the porch.

I took note of these things in the few minutes I stood waiting in the hall, and if I had to sum up my first impressions of the home of Rossetti, I should say it looked like a house that no woman had ever dwelt in, a house inhabited by a man who had once felt a vivid interest in life, but was now living from day to day.

Very soon Rossetti came to me through the doorway in front, which proved to be the entrance to his studio. Holding out both hands and crying "Hulloa," he gave me that cheery, hearty greeting which I have come to recognise as belonging to him alone, perhaps, of all the men I have ever known. Leading the way into the studio, he introduced me to his brother William, who was there on one of the evening visits which, at intervals of a week, he made then with unfailing regularity.

PROPERTY OF THE SCARBOROUGH

I should have described Rossetti, at that time, as a man who looked quite ten years older than his actual age (fifty-two), of full middle height and inclining to corpulence, with a round face that ought, one thought, to be ruddy but was pale; with large gray eyes that had a steady introspective look and were surmounted by broad protrusive brows, and divided by a clearly pencilled ridge over the nose, which was well cut and had breathing nostrils resembling the nostrils of a high-bred horse.

His mouth and chin were hidden beneath a heavy moustache and an abundant beard which had once been mixed black-brown and auburn, but were now thickly streaked with gray. His forehead was large, round, without protuberances, and very gently receding to where thin black curls began to roll round to the ears. I thought his head and face singularly noble, and from the eyes upward full of beauty.

His dress was not conspicuous, being rather negligent than eccentric, and only remarkable for a straight sack coat (his "painting coat") buttoned close to the throat, descending at least to the knees, and having large perpendicular pockets, in which he kept his hands almost constantly while he walked to and fro. His voice, even in the preliminary courtesies

of conversation, was, I thought, the richest I had ever heard. It was a deep, full barytone, with easy modulations and undertones of infinite softness and sweetness, yet capable, as I speedily found, of almost illimitable compass.

Such was Rossetti, as he seemed to me when I saw him first—a noticeable man, indeed, an Englishman in his stolid build, an Italian in the dark fire of his face, a man of genius in the strength and individuality which expressed themselves in his outer personality without singularity or affectation.

The studio was a large irregular room, structurally puzzling to one who saw it for the first time. Over the fireplace and at either side of it hung a number of drawings in chalk, chiefly studies of female heads, all very beautiful, and all by Rossetti himself. Easels of various size, some very large, bearing partially painted pictures, stood at irregular angles nearly all over the floor, leaving room only for a few pieces of furniture—a large sofa, under a holland cover, somewhat baggy and soiled, two low easy chairs, similarly apparelled, a large bookcase with a glass front, surmounted by a yellow copy of the Stratford bust of Shakespeare, two carved cabinets, and a little writing desk and cane-bottomed chair in the corner, near a

small window which was heavily darkened by the thick foliage of the trees that grew in the garden beyond.

As I had arrived late and the light was failing, Rossetti immediately drew up an easel containing a picture he wished me to see, and I recall a large canvas full of the bright sunshine of spring, with a beautiful lady sitting reading in a tree that was heavily laden with pink and white blossom. Remembering the sense of the open air which the picture conveyed, I cannot forget the pallid face of the painter as he stood beside it, or the close atmosphere of his studio, with its smell of paint and the musty odour of accumulated treasures lying long undisturbed in a room that can have been rarely visited by the winds of heaven.

I helped Rossetti to push the big easel out of the way. Then he dropped down on the sofa at full length, letting his head lie low on the cushion and throwing his feet up on the back. In this attitude—which I afterward saw was a favourite one with him—he began the conversation by telling me with various humorous touches, how like I was to what a well-known friend of his had been at my age, and then he bantered me for several minutes on what he called my "robustious" appearance

compared with that which he had been led to expect from gloomy reports of uncertain health. It was all done in the easiest conceivable way, and was so playful and so natural, as coming from a great and famous man on his first meeting with a young fellow half his age, who regarded him with a reverence only modified by affection, that it might fairly have conveyed any impression on earth save the right one, that Rossetti was a bundle of nerves, a creature of emotions all compact, and that, at this period, a visit from a new friend, however harmless and insignificant, was an ordeal of almost tragic gravity to him.

Then one by one he glanced at certain of the more personal topics that had arisen in the course of our correspondence, and I soon saw that he was a ready, fluent and graceful talker, with an unusual incisiveness of speech which gave the effect of wit even when it was not wit. I remember, among the little things that struck me at that first meeting with Rossetti, a trick he had of snapping his long fingers as he talked, and the constant presence of his hands, which were small and smooth and delicate as a young girl's, with tapering fingers, that he seemed to be always looking at and playing with.

Very soon the talk became general, his brother William, who had hitherto been silent, joining in it at intervals, and then Rossetti spoke, without appearance of reserve, of the few intimate friends who frequented his house at that period, telling me, among other things, that Mr. Watts (now Watts-Dunton) had a head like Napoleon's, "whom he detests," he said with a chuckle; that Frederic Shields was as hysterical as Shelley, and Ford Madox Brown, whom I had met, as sententious as Dr. Johnson.

I thought Rossetti was amusing himself by bantering his friends in their absence, in the assured confidence that he was doing so in the presence of a well-wisher; but it was interesting to observe that after any particularly lively sally, or dash of personal ridicule, he would pause in the midst of his laughter, which was a deep, full-chested roar, to say something in a sober tone that was intended to convey the idea that he had really said nothing at all.

Contrary to his declared habit, he did not dine in the studio, but when a bright young maid-servant announced the dinner, he led the way to one of the two rooms entering out of the hall, a square apartment of moderate size, apparently all green in colour, carpet, curtains,

ROSSETTI'S GREEN DINING-ROOM.

walls, and furniture, but also noticeable for many mirrors, most of them round and beautiful.

I remember that as we dined, Rossetti, who seemed to be in the best of spirits, rattled off one or two of the rhymes, now called "Limericks," at the making of which, nobody who ever attempted that form of amusement has ever been known to match him. He could turn them out as fast as he could talk, with such point, such humour, such building up to a climax, that even when they verged on the personal, or yet the profane (as I fear they sometimes did), it was impossible to receive the last word without a shout. I recall that on this occasion he recited for my amusement a rhyme he had made on a poet friend who had lost his hair, and with the sting of it still in my mind I should not wonder if the almost fatal facility he had in the writing of satirical doggerel sometimes cost the poet dear.

After dinner, in the studio, I asked Rossetti to fulfil his promise to read some of his new ballads to me. He responded readily, like a man who was glad to read his poetry to an admirer, only apologising to his brother, who had heard everything before.

Unlocking a section of the big book-case, and

again unlocking an old carved oak box that stood on one of the shelves, he took out a small manuscript volume, and after putting on a second pair of spectacles over the pair he usually wore, he read "The White Ship."

It seemed to me that I had never heard anything at all equal to Rossetti's elocution, if reading so entirely without conscious art can be called by that name. The poet's deep, rich voice lent music to the music of the verse; it rose and fell in the passages descriptive of the wreck with something of the surge and sibilation of the sea itself; in the tenderer passages, it was as soft and low as a girl's, and in the pathetic stanzas at the close, it was indescribably moving.

The evening had gone by the time the ballad was ended, and when William Rossetti rose to go, I got up to go with him. Then it was arranged that on returning through London after my holiday on the South coast I should dine with Rossetti again and sleep the night at his house. He came into the hall to see us off, and down to the last his high spirits never failed him. I recall some further bantering as I was going out at the door, and the full-chested laugh that followed us over the little paved court between the house and the gate.

MY FIRST MEETING WITH ROSSETTI

Our little night journey, William's and mine, in the hansom cab which was to drop me at the door of the "hole-and-cornerest" of all hotels, which, as a young countryman, ignorant of London, I had somehow ferreted out, is made ever memorable to me by a dazed sense I had of having seen and spoken to and spent an evening with—what I thought—the greatest man on earth. That is a sensation that only comes once perhaps to any of us, and it was after my first meeting with Rossetti that it came to me.

CHAPTER III

A NIGHT AT CHEYNE WALK

ABOUT a fortnight later I returned to Cheyne Walk, and was welcomed with the same cheery "Hulloa" from Rossetti, who was lying, as I entered the studio in the early evening, in his favourite attitude on the couch. He was alone on this occasion, and notwithstanding the warmth of my reception, I noticed that he was in some respects a changed man, his spirits being lower, his face more weary, even his voice more tired.

In answer to inquiries as to where I had been and what I had been doing, I talked, with the animation of a young man interested in life in many aspects, of the delightful Halliwell-Phillipps (with whom I had been staying at Brighton) and his group of good old Shakespearean dry-as-dusts, and then of Henry Irving, who was rising into celebrity as a Shakespearean actor. Rossetti lay on the sofa and listened, dropping out occasional observations,

such as that Miss Herbert, an actress and a former friend, had spoken long ago of a young fellow in her company named Irving, predicting great success for him.

But it was soon made clear to me that the poet was more amused by the impetuous rush as of fresh air from the outer world which came to him with my company than interested in the affairs of the outer world itself. Indeed, I speedily saw that Rossetti knew very little of what was going on outside the close atmosphere of his own house and the circle of his literary and artistic activities, and that he did not care to know.

Expecting my return, he had pulled a huge canvas into a position in which it could be seen, and it was then I saw, for the first time, the painter's most important picture, "Dante's Dream." The effect produced upon me by that wonderful work, so simple in its scheme, so conventional in its composition, yet so noble in its feeling and so profound in its emotion, has probably been repeated a thousand times since in minds more capable of appreciating the technical qualities of the painter's art; but few or none can know what added power of appeal the great picture had as I saw it then, under the waning light of an autumn afternoon,

in the painter's studio, so full of the atmosphere of the picture itself, and with the painter beside it, so clearly a man out of another age.

Rossetti told me something of the history of "Dante's Dream"; how it had been commissioned by a friend, and returned in exchange for a replica because of its great size, which made it practically impossible for a private collection. Whereupon I decided, that if any efforts of mine could avail, Liverpool should buy the picture for its public gallery.

"Does your work take much out of you in physical energy?" I asked.

"Not my painting, certainly," said Rossetti, "though in earlier years it tormented me more than enough. Now I paint by a set of unwritten but clearly defined rules, which I could teach to any man as systematically as you could teach arithmetic."

"Still," I said, "there's a good deal in a picture like this beside what you can do by rule —eh?"

I laughed, he laughed, and then he said, as nearly as I can remember:

"Conception, no doubt; but beyond that, not much. Painting, after all, is the craft of a superior carpenter. The part of a picture that is not mechanical is often trivial enough." And

then, with the suspicion of a twinkle in his eye, he added:

"I shouldn't wonder, now, if you imagine that one comes down in a fine frenzy every morning to daub canvas."

More laughter on both sides, and then I said I certainly imagined that a superior carpenter would find it hard to paint another "Dante's Dream," which I considered the best example I had yet seen of the English school.

"Friendly nonsense," replied my frank host; "there is now no English school whatever."

"Well," I said, "if you deny the name to others who lay more claim to it, will you not at least allow it to the three or four painters who started with you in life—the pre-Raphaelites, you know?"

"Not at all, unless it is to Brown, and he's more French than English. Hunt and Jones have no more claim to it than I have. Pre-Raphaelites! A group of young fellows who couldn't draw!" With this came one of his full-chested laughs, and then quickly behind it:

"As for all the prattle about pre-Raphaelitism, I confess to you I am weary of it, and long have been. Why should we go on talking about the visionary vanities of half-a-dozen boys? We've all grown out of them, I hope, by now."

We dined in the studio that night, and I recall the suggestion of my host's Italian origin in the thick pipes of macaroni, cooked dry and then smothered in thick layers of cheese, and the red Chianti, diluted with water; but there was no sweet or coffee, and Rossetti did not smoke.

Returning, after dinner, to my inquiry as to whether his work took much out of him, he replied that his poetry usually did.

"In that respect," he said, "I am the reverse of Swinburne. For his method of production, inspiration is, indeed, the word. With me the case is different. I lie on the couch, the racked and tortured medium, never permitted an instant's relief until the thing in hand is finished."

Then, at my request, taking the same little manuscript volume from the small oak box in the locked section of the bookcase, he read his unpublished ballad, "Rose Mary," telling me it had been written in the country shortly after the publication of his first volume of poems, that it had occupied only three weeks in the writing, and that the physical prostration ensuing had been more than he would care to go through again.

He then read to me a great body of the new sonnets, which in a forthcoming volume he in-

tended to incorporate in a section to be called "The House of Life." Sitting in that studio, listening to the rise and fall of his wonderful voice, and looking up at the chalk drawings that hung on the walls, I realised how truly he had said in correspondence that the feeling pervading his pictures was such as his poetry ought to suggest.

Once or twice, after the emotion of the written words had broken up his voice, he would pause and laugh a little (a constrained laugh in his throat), and say:

"I dare say you think it odd to hear an old fellow read such love poetry, as much of this is, but I may tell you that the larger part of it was written when I was as young as you are."

I remember that he read, with especial emotion and a voice that could barely support itself, the pathetic sonnet entitled "Without Her":

> "What of her glass without her? . . .
> . . . Her pillowed place
> Without her? . . .
> What of the heart without her? . . ."

The lines came with tears of voice, subsiding at length into something like a suppressed sob, and they were followed by an interval of si-

lence. But after a moment, as if trying to explain away his emotion and to deprive it of any personal reference in my mind, he said:

"All poetry affects me deeply, and often to tears. It doesn't need to be pathetic, or yet tender, to produce this result."

Then he went on to say that he had known in his life two men, and two only, who were similarly sensitive—Tennyson, and his friend, Bell Scott.

"I once heard Tennyson read 'Maud,'" he said, "and while the fiery passages were given with a voice and vehemence which he alone could compass, the softer passages and the songs made the tears run down his cheeks like rain. Morris is a fine reader, too, and so of his kind, although a little prone to sing-song, is Swinburne. Browning both reads and talks well—at least he did so when I knew him intimately as a young man."

I asked if he had ever heard Ruskin read, and he replied:

"I must have done so, but I remember nothing clearly. On one occasion, however, I heard him deliver a speech, and that was something never to forget. When we were young we helped Frederick Dennison Maurice by taking classes at his Working Men's College, and there

Charles Kingsley and others made speeches and delivered lectures. Ruskin was asked to do something of the kind, and at length consented. He made no sort of preparation for the occasion; I knew he did not—we were together at his father's house the whole of the day. At night we drove down to the college, and then he made the most finished speech I ever heard. I doubted at the time if any written words of his were equal to it. Such flaming diction, such emphasis, such appeal! Yet he had written his first and second volumes of 'Modern Painters' by that time."

There was a certain incisiveness in Rossetti's conversation of which I try in vain to convey more than a suggestion. He had both wit and humour, but these qualities during the time I knew him were only occasionally present, while his incisiveness (sometimes giving the surprise of wit) was always conspicuous.

On this night of my second visit we sat up until four in the morning, no unaccustomed hour for him, as I afterward learned, for he had never at any period been an early riser, and was then more than ever prone to reverse the natural order of sleeping and waking hours.

"I lie as long, or say as late, as Doctor Johnson used to," he said. "You shall never know,

until you discover it for yourself, at what hour I rise."

And now I do not feel that I can omit to mention that just as we were getting up to go to bed, Rossetti revealed a new side of his character, or, more properly, a new phase of his mind, which gave me infinite anxiety and distress. Branching off at that late hour from an entirely foreign topic, he begged me to tell him the facts of an unlucky debate in which I had long before been engaged on a public platform with some one who had attacked him. He had read a short report of what had passed at a time when both my name and the name of his assailant were unknown to him, and now he wished to hear everything. I tried to avoid a circumstantial statement, being forewarned by his brother, on that night ride after my first visit, of the poet's peculiar sensitiveness to criticism; but Rossetti was "of imagination all compact," and my obvious desire to shelve the subject was plainly suggesting to his mind a thousand inferences that were infinitely more damaging than the fact. To avoid this result I told him all, and there was not much to tell.

The lecture on his poetry, which led to the beginning of our friendship, had been presided over on the platform at Liverpool by a public

man of more than local celebrity as a patron and critic of art, and at the close of my passionate panegyric, in which I had perhaps dwelt too insistently on the spiritual influences animating the poet's work, my chairman rose, and, as nearly as I can remember, said:

"We have all listened with interest and admiration to the eloquent . . ." (etc.), "but it would be wrong of me not to warn the audience against the teaching of the lecturer. So far from Rossetti being animated mainly, or even largely, by spiritual passion, he is the most sensuous, not to say sensual, of English poets, and in his other character as artist I can best describe him as the greatest *animal* painter alive."

This and a few similar strictures, partly provoked, it may be, by the misdirection of my own eulogy, followed by a heated reply from myself, rapturously applauded by an audience which was probably indifferent to the question in dispute, and interested only in the unusual spectacle of a stand-up fight between the young lecturer and the city father, with a word or two of brusque characterisation aimed at "Jenny," whom I had perhaps dwelt with as a soiled Madonna, was all there was to repeat in the way of an attack.

Rossetti listened but too eagerly to my narrative, with drooped head and changing colour, and then, in a voice slower, softer, and more charged, perhaps, with emotion than I had heard before, said it was the old story, which began ten years before and would go on until he had been hunted and hounded into his grave.

Startled, and indeed appalled, by so grave a view of what seemed to me, after all, an unimportant incident, and no more than an error of critical judgment, coupled with some intemperance of condemnation for which my own heat had been partly to blame, I prayed of him to think no more of the matter, reproached myself with having yielded to his importunity, and begged of him to remember that if one man held the opinions I had repeated, many men held contrary ones.

"It was right of you to tell me when I asked you," he said, "though my friends usually keep such facts from my knowledge. As to 'Jenny,' it is a sermon, nothing less. As I say, it is a sermon, and on a great world, to most men unknown, though few consider themselves ignorant of it. But of this conspiracy to persecute me—what remains to say except that it is widespread and remorseless? One cannot but feel it."

I assured him that there existed no conspiracy to persecute him; that he had ardent upholders everywhere, though it was true that few men had found crueller critics. He shook his head, and said I knew that what he had alleged was true, namely, that an organised conspiracy existed, having for its object to annoy and injure him, and to hold him up to the public execration as an evil influence on his time. So tyrannical, he said, had the conspiracy become that it had altered the habits of his life, and practically confined him for years to the limits of his own home.

Growing impatient of this delusion, so tenaciously held to against all show of reason, I forgot the disparity of our ages and told him that what he was saying was no more than the fever of a morbid brain, brought about by his reclusive habits of life, by shunning intercourse with all the world save some half-dozen or more intimate friends.

"You tell me," I said, "that you have rarely been outside these walls for years, and meanwhile your brain has been breeding a host of hallucinations that are like cobwebs in a dark corner. You have only to go out again, and the fresh air will blow all these things away."

He smiled, perhaps at the boldness of youth, a sad smile, and then, going on again for some

moments longer in the same strain, he came to closer quarters and distressed me by naming as enemies two public men, one of them the outstanding statesman of the time (who had lately given a pension to the critic who had most savagely abused him), and three or four authors of high repute, who had been his close friends in earlier life, but had fallen away from him in later years, owing to circumstances that had no relation to alienated regard.

"You're all wrong," I said. "I'm sure you're all wrong."

"Ah, well, let's go to bed," said Rossetti; and I could see that his conviction was unshaken and his delusions remained.

We took candles from a table in the hall and went up a narrow and tortuous staircase, which was otherwise dark, to a landing from which many rooms seemed to open, so large was the house in which Rossetti lived alone, except for a cook and two maid-servants.

"You are to sleep in Watts's room to-night," he said, and then he suggested that before going to my own bedroom, I should take a look at his. I cheerfully assented, but walking through the long corridor that led to the poet's room, we had to pass another apartment, and after a moment's pause, Rossetti opened the door and

we went in. It was the drawing-room, a very large chamber, barely illuminated by the candles in our hands, and full of the musty odour of a place long shut up.

Suspended from the middle of the ceiling there hung a huge Venetian candelabrum, from whose facets the candle light glittered, and on the walls were a number of small water-colour drawings in plain oak frames. Rossetti drew me up to the pictures, and I remember that they seemed to me rather crude in colour and in drawing, but very touching in sentiment (one in particular representing a young girl parting from her lover on the threshold of a convent, being deeply charged with feeling), and that I said:

"I should have thought that the man who painted these pictures was rather a poet than a painter—who was it?"

Rossetti, who was standing before the drawing, as I see him still, in the dark room with the candle in his hand, said, in a low voice: "It was my wife. She had great genius."

His own bedroom was entered from another and smaller room, which he told me he used as a breakfast room. The outer room was made fairly bright by a glittering chandelier (the property at one time, he said, of David Gar-

rick). By the rustle of the trees against the window pane one realised that it overlooked the garden. But the inner room was dark with heavy hangings around the walls, as well as about the bed (a black four-poster), and thick velvet curtains before the windows, so that the candles we carried seemed unable to light it, and our voices sounded muffled and thick. An enormous black oak chimneypiece, of curious design, having an ivory crucifix on the largest of its ledges, covered a part of one side of the room and reached to the ceiling. Cabinets, a bath, and the usual furniture of a bedroom occupied places about the floor, and in the middle of it, before a little couch, there was a small table on which stood a wired lantern containing a candle, which Rossetti lit from the open one in his hand—another candle lying by its side. I remarked that he probably burned a light all night, and he said that was so.

"My curse is insomnia," he added. "Two or three hours hence I shall get up and lie on the couch, and, to pass away a weary hour, read this book" (a volume of Boswell's "Johnson" which he had taken out of the bookcase as we left the studio).

Then I saw that on the table were two small bottles, sealed and labelled, and beside them

was a little measuring glass. Without looking further, but with a painful suspicion over me, I asked if that was his medicine.

"They say there's a skeleton in every cupboard," he said in a low voice. "That's mine; it's chloral."

When I reached the room I was to occupy for the rest of the night, I found it, like Rossetti's bedroom, heavy with hangings and black with antique picture panels, having a ceiling so high as to be out of all reach and sight, and so dark from various causes that the candle seemed only to glitter in it.

Presently Rossetti, who had left me in my room, came back, for no purpose that I can remember except to say that he had much enjoyed my visit, and I replied that I should never forget it.

"If you decide to settle in London," he said, "I trust you'll come and live with me, and then many such evenings must remove the memory of this one."

I laughed, for what he so generously hinted at seemed to me the remotest contingency.

"I have just taken sixty grains of chloral," he said, as he was going out. "In four hours I shall take sixty more, and in four hours after that yet another sixty."

"Doesn't the dose increase with you?" I asked.

"It has not done so perceptibly in recent years. I judge I've taken more chloral than any man whatever. Marshall" (his medical man) "says if I were put into a Turkish bath, I should sweat it at every pore."

As he said this, standing half outside the threshold, there was something in his tone and laugh suggesting that he was even proud of the accomplishment. To me it was a frightful revelation, accounting largely, if not entirely, for what had puzzled and distressed me in the delusions I have referred to.

And so, after four in the morning, amid the odour of bygone ages, with thoughts of that big and almost empty house, of the servants somewhere out of all reach and sound, of Rossetti in his muffled room, of that wired lantern, and the two bottles of chloral, I fell asleep.

When I awoke in the morning, the white daylight was coming into my dark bedroom through the chinks of the closed shutters, which, being opened, disclosed a garden so large and so completely encompassed by trees as to hide almost entirely the surrounding houses. Remembering what I had heard of the menagerie of wild birds and tame beasts which Rossetti used to keep

in this garden, I went down before breakfast to look at it.

The garden was of a piece with what I had seen of the house. A beautiful avenue of lime-trees opened into a grass plot of nearly an acre in extent. The trees were just as Nature made them, and so was the grass, which was lying, in its broad blades, long and dry and withered, in ugly tufts, with weeds creeping up in the dry places, and moss growing on the gravel of the path. The wild birds and tame beasts were gone, but the sparrows were chirping from the trees in the sunshine of the clear autumn morning, and one little linnet was singing from a bough of the chestnut that looked in at the window of Rossetti's bedroom, still blind with its closed shutters, though the hour was now late.

A pathway ran near to the wall round the four sides of the garden, and here, as I heard the night before, Rossetti took his only fresh air and exercise, walking six times about the enclosure every day. So quiet, indeed so dead, was the overgrown place that it was difficult to believe it was in the heart of London, and, looking up at that shuttered window, it was easy to wish it was not.

But if the back of the house was silent, the

front of it was full enough of life. I breakfasted in the little green dining-room—the room of the round mirrors—and it was flooded with sunshine, and even deafened with noise—the rattle of tradesmen's carts and the whoop of the butcher as he was scudding down the Walk.

Before leaving the house I went into the studio again to take another look at the great "Dante," and the silent place, with its faint odour of paint, its canvases full of glorious colour, its chalk drawings in black and red of women with beautiful but melancholy faces, seemed to sweep one back again in a moment to some Italian city of three centuries ago.

When I was about to leave the house at a late hour that morning, Rossetti was not yet stirring; but his housekeeper (who was also his cook), an elderly body, nervous and anxious and obviously perplexed by the conditions of her life in that strange house with a master of exceptional habits, came to me with a letter which she said she had found lying on the table in the outer room where Rossetti took his breakfast. It was a parting message from the poet, probably written in that interval of wakefulness in the middle of the night when, as he had told me, he got up and read on the couch.

My Dear Caine,—

I forgot to say—Don't please, spread details as to the story of *Rose Mary*. I don't want it to be stale or to get forestalled in the traveling of report from mouth to mouth. I hope it won't be too long before you visit town again—I will not for an instant question that you will then visit me also. D. G. R.

I do not think anybody who has realised (as, indeed, should be most easy) the space that divided me—a young fellow, unknown and but half his age—from this great and illustrious man, will wonder that he was absolutely irresistible to me; but if I have to formulate the emotions which possessed me as I left his house on the occasion of this second visit, I will say that it was not so much his genius as his unhappiness that held me as by a spell.

Before this I had been attracted by admiration of his great gifts, but now I was drawn to him by something very akin to pity for his isolation and suffering. Not that at this time he made demand of much compassion. Health was apparently whole with him, his spirits were good, and his energies were at their best. He had not yet known the full bitterness of the Shadowed Valley; not yet learned what it was to hunger for any cheerful society that would relieve him of the burden of the flesh. All that

came later, and meantime Rossetti was to me the most fascinating, the most inspiring, the most affectionate, and the most magnetic of men.

Next morning I was at work with my drawing-board and T-square in the little office overlooking the builder's yard, busy with workmen and carts and the commonplace traffic of modern life.

CHAPTER IV

I BECOME ROSSETTI'S HOUSEMATE

THE better part of a year passed before I saw Rossetti again, but meantime I was in constant correspondence with him, so that the continuity of our intercourse was never broken for so much as a day. Long afterward, when he was very ill, he said to me:

"How well I remember the beginning of our correspondence, and how little did I think it would lead to such relations between us as have ensued! I was at that time very solitary and depressed from various causes, and the letters of a well-wisher so young and so ardent, though unknown to me personally, brought a good deal of comfort."

"Your letters," I said, "were very valuable to me."

"Mine to you," he answered, "were among the largest body of literary letters I ever wrote, others being often letters on personal subjects."

"And so admirable in themselves," I added, "that many of them would bear to be printed exactly as you penned them."

"That," he said, "will be for you some day to decide."

Later still, I remember, at a very solemn moment, he said:

"Caine, how long have we been friends?"

I replied: "Between three and four years."

"And how long did we correspond?"

"Three years, nearly."

"What numbers of my letters you must possess! They may perhaps even yet be useful to you; otherwise our friendship may prove to have been more burden than service."

Only that I knew how unselfish had been the impulse which prompted the last remark, I might perhaps from that moment have regarded the publication of Rossetti's letters to me as a sort of trust. Some extracts I did indeed give from them in the earlier book already referred to, and even now I content myself with indicating the drift of those long conversations by post which were the consequence of the two hundred miles which divided me from my friend.

If, as I have not hesitated to show in an earlier chapter, Rossetti gave me on occasion

the encouragement of his warmest praise, he did not shrink from playing the part of Mentor also, censuring particularly a tendency to obscurity and involution in style, the abnormal search after "phrase" and the "outstanding word," which, strange as I find it to remember, was at that time a disfiguring characteristic of my mind. Prose might be fervid and vivid, but it ought to be simple and direct, rarely calling attention to itself, never breaking the rhythmic flow by forced or foreign expression or yet carrying it on for the mere sake of effect.

"Surely," he said, "you are strong enough to be English pure and simple. I am sure I could write a hundred essays on all possible subjects (I once did project a series under the title 'Essays written in the intervals of Elephantiasis, Hydrophobia, and Penal Servitude'), without once experiencing the 'aching void,' which is filled by such words as 'mythopœic' and 'anthropomorphism.' I do not find life long enough to know in the least what they mean. They are both very long and very ugly, indeed—the latter only suggesting to me a vampire or a somnambulant cannibal."

He was equally severe on my tendency to quote the opinions of certain journals that had spoken well of me. The criticism of good crit-

ics might be good, and therefore good to quote, but much criticism was bad, and therefore it was bad to mention it.

"Really, I cannot but say," he said, "that the last page of your new pamphlet is sadly disfigured by the names of London prints which are conducted by the lowest gangs—at least I will answer for *one* being so. You have begun, as you tell me, and as I somewhat divine, in a scrambling literary way, and the sooner you shake all such connections off the nearer you will be to your goal. No need to take any notice of this in any way. It is a finger-post, which only asks to be followed in silence. Indeed, I will *ask* you not to answer."

Having to some extent cast in his lot with me, he was irritated by any loss of what he thought becoming dignity on my part, and not only remonstrated against my publishing articles in magazines which he called "farragoes of absolute garbage," but was even reluctant to allow me, when I was about to edit an anthology of sonnets, to write to the poets who were to be asked to contribute.

"I must say I rather doubt the wisdom of writing without introduction to such men as you mention. A superior man runs the risk, by doing so, of being confounded with those

who are perpetually directing correspondence to any one whose name they have heard—and the bibliographic and autograph-hunting tribe whose name is legion. I do not mean that such an application as yours could *rightly* be classed with these, but I know the sort of exclamation that rises to the lips of a man as much beset by strangers as (say) Swinburne, when he opens a letter and sees a new name at the end of it."

He was hardly less irritated by a tendency of mine to set the manner of a work higher than its substance, to glorify style as if it were a thing apart from subject.

"You have too great a habit of speaking of a special octave, sestette, or line. Conception, my boy, FUNDAMENTAL BRAINWORK, that is what makes the difference in all art. Work your metal as much as you like, but first take care that it is gold and worth working. A Shakespearian sonnet is better than the most perfect in form because Shakespeare wrote it."

But "I hope you won't think that I am everlastingly playing Mentor," he said, and to lift up my heart after so many packs of the wet blanket, he wrote, about a new lecture on the scarcely confluent elements of "Politics and Art": "It is abundantly rich in spirit and ani-

mated truth, and in powerful language, too, when required. It must do you high credit wherever seen, and when you are able to enlarge your sphere, I look to you as destined to rank among the coming teachers of men."

All the same he was too discreet to accept the dedication of this same lecture, when I came to print it, though the letter in which he declined was touching, and I think sincere:

"I must admit at all hazards that my friends consider me exceptionally averse to politics; and I suppose I must be, for I have never read a Parliamentary debate in my life! At the same time I must add, that, among those whose opinions I most value, some think me not altogether wrong when I venture to speak of the momentary momentousness and eternal futility of many noisiest questions. However, you must simply view me as a nonentity in any practical relation to such matters. You have spoken but too generously of a sonnet of mine in the lecture just received. I have written a few others of the sort (which, by-the-bye, would not prove me a Tory), but felt no vocation—perhaps no right—to print them. I have always reproached myself as sorely amenable to the condemnation of a very fine poem by

Barberino on 'Sloth against Sin,' which I translated in the Dante volume. Sloth, alas! has too much to answer for with me; and is one of the reasons (though I will not say the only one) why I have always fallen back on quality instead of quantity in the little I have ever done. I think often with Coleridge:

'Sloth jaundiced all: and from my graspless hand
Drop friendship's precious pearls like hour-glass sand.
I weep, yet stoop not: the faint anguish flows,
A dreamy pang in morning's feverish doze.'"

Though my beginnings had been scrambling ones, it was my own fault now if my literary education was not more thorough, and even more systematic, than any school or university could have given me. Notwithstanding the calls of my ordinary occupation, I was reading as much as six, eight, and even ten hours a day, and corresponding constantly on the subject of my reading with a man of genius whose knowledge of literature was very wide and whose instinct for excellence very sure. Our studies were, of course, mainly English, but I think they covered the whole range of what was best—from Shakespeare and even less-known Elizabethan poets, through Steele, Savage, Goldsmith, Johnson, Cowper, Fielding, and

Richardson to the writers of the "Lake," "Cockney," and "Satanic" schools, coming down to our own day with Tennyson and Browning, and covering some of the forgotten geniuses of yesterday, such as Smart and Wells.

Rossetti's letters, which are equal in quantity to the contents of a large volume, are studded with names familiar and unfamiliar, which show how vigorously throughout the years in which he had been occupied chiefly with painting he must have burrowed in the by-paths as well as laboured in the highways of literature; and when I remember the disadvantages of my own beginning, I must not forget that for two and a half years I had the daily coaching of Rossetti's forty years of reading and the constant guidance of his fine selective instinct. That of itself ought to have been a literary education of the highest kind, though it was not then that I so regarded it, nor do I suppose for a moment that Rossetti himself looked at it in such a light. I see, with some amusement, that in the course of our correspondence I sometimes withstood his judgments, and occasionally remonstrated against his "prejudices."

Thus I protested that he was radically unjust to Wordsworth, whom he had not the patience

to read except in fugitive passages taken at random, and he answered:

"I grudge Wordsworth every vote he gets. . . . No one regards the great Ode with more special and unique homage than I do, as a thing absolutely alone of its kind among all greatest things. I cannot say that anything else of his with which I have ever been familiar (and I suffer from long disuse of all familiarity with him) seems to me all on a level with this."

We were on common ground, however, in the worship of Coleridge. "The three greatest English imaginations," he said, "are Shakespeare, Coleridge, and Shelley," and he was never tired of extolling the beauties of "Christabel."

"Of course, the first part is so immeasurably beyond the second, that one feels Charles Lamb's view was right, and the poem should have been abandoned at that point. The passage on Sundered Friendship is one of the masterpieces of the language, but no doubt was written quite separately and then fitted into 'Christabel'—the two lines about 'Roland and Sir Leoline' are simply an intrusion and an outrage."

Another of Rossetti's references to "Christabel" is interesting for the peep it affords

into the home of his boyhood, where English books, it seems, were few.

"There are, I believe, many continuations of 'Christabel.' Tupper did one! I myself saw a continuation in childhood, long before I saw the original, and was all agog to see it for years. Our household was all Italian, not English environment, however, and it was only when I went to school later that I began to ransack book-stalls."

With sufficient audacity, I came into collision with Rossetti again over Chatterton, whom I was not at first prepared to regard with special reverence, apart from the fact that, against tremendous odds and at seventeen years of age, he had written anything that deserved to be remembered at all; but nothing would suffice for Rossetti but that I should go down on my knees and worship the author of the African Eclogues.

"I assure you," he said, "Chatterton was as great as any English poet whatever, and might absolutely, had he lived, have proved the only man in England's theatre of imagination who could have bandied parts with Shakespeare."

At my insinuation that perhaps part of one's interest in Chatterton had its origin in the fact that he was a bit of a blackguard, and not so

much in admiration of his poems as in surprise that a boy of sixteen should have written them, Rossetti, as was most natural, fired up warmly:

"I must protest finally that the man who says that cannot know what criticism means. Chatterton was an absolute and untarnished hero. . . . Surely a boy up to eighteen may be pardoned for exercising his faculty if he happens to be one among millions who can use grown men as his toys. Certainly that most vigorous passage commencing—

'Interest, thou universal God of men,'

reads startlingly, and comes in a questionable shape. What is the answer to its enigmatical aspect? Why, that he *meant* it, and that all would mean it at his age, who had his power, his daring, and his hunger."

I was on safer ground with Rossetti when we began to write about Keats, "the lovely and beloved Keats."

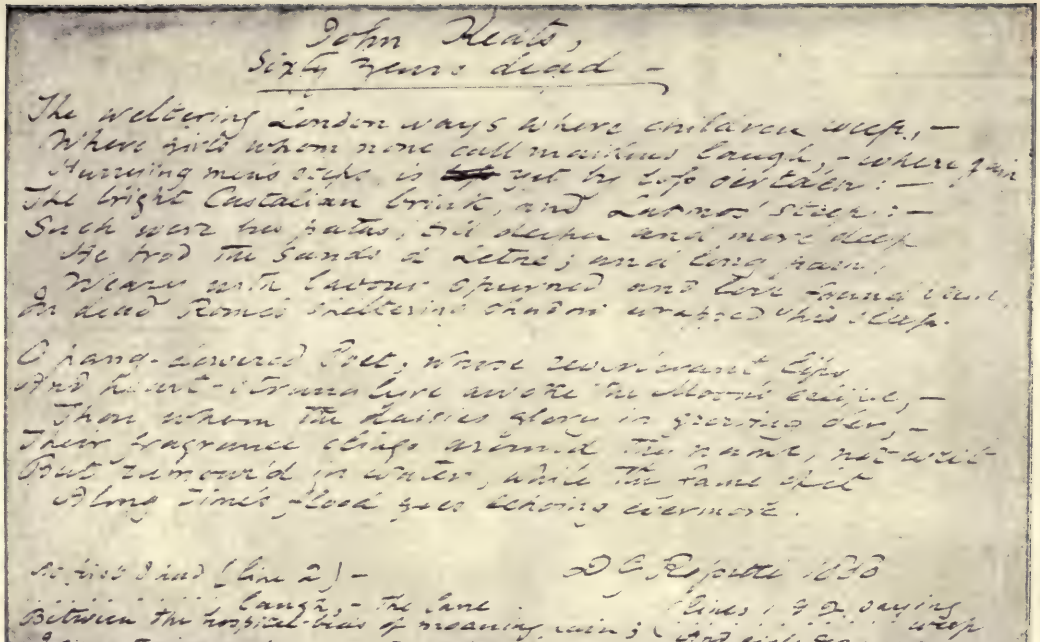
"You say an excellent thing," he said, "when you ask, 'Where can we look for more poetry per page than Keats gives us?' I shall look forward with very great interest to your essay on Keats."

And when the Keats paper was sent to him,

he made up many critical denunciations by the warmest sympathy.

"I have this minute at last read the Keats paper, and return it. It is excellent throughout, and the closing passage is very finely worded. . . . You quote some of Keats's sayings. One of the most characteristic, I think, is in a letter to Haydon: 'I value more the privilege of seeing great things in loneliness than the fame of a prophet.' . . . Keats wrote to Shelley: 'You, I am sure, will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore.' Cheeky! but not so much amiss. Poetry and not prophecy, however, must have come of that mood; and no pulpit would have held Keats's wings."

The Rossetti correspondence had, with great profit to me, been going on for a considerable time when my personal affairs reached an acute but not altogether unexpected crisis. My long-standing grievance against my everyday occupation as a builder's draughtsman was, in spite of the never-failing indulgence of my employer, brought to a head by another attack of illness. The symptoms were sufficiently alarming this time, but, although satisfied that I had received



John Keats,
Sixty years dead —

The weltering London ways where children weep, —
Where girls whom none call maidens laugh, — where fain
Hurrying men strive to put by life's arrear: —
The bright Castalian brink, and Lethe's stair: —
Such were his haunts, but sleep and now deep
He trod the sands of Lethe, and long roam.
Where on the Latmian slopes mixed with the Latin shade
An added name trembles unrebuked their talk.

O fang-severed soft, whose reverberate life
Still rings — "Forgotten ere the blossom perish," —
Thou whom the Nereids grave in goodlier den, —
Their fragrance clings around the name, nor will
But summer on it water, while the years spell
Long lines, fleet grace echoing evermore.

Sonnet by Rossetti.

D G Rossetti 1880

As first sent [Line 2] —

Between the hospital-bars of moaning pain; (And girls go ... weep
I gave this as becomes London sorrow alms at a passing foot of the Lord

my death warrant, I said nothing to anybody except the doctor and Rossetti, to whom, by this time, I was in the habit of telling everything. Rossetti replied with his usual solicitude, coupled with his customary remonstrance.

Grave as the issue certainly was, it is almost amusing to me to remember that, being convinced that my failure of health was mainly due to the zeal with which for several years I had been burning the candle at both ends, it did not occur to me for a moment to put it out at the end that was apparently least necessary to my material welfare. My easy work in the building yard made me my living, while my hard work with my books made me nothing at all; but I take it to be an evidence of how the itch for writing will conquer all practical considerations, and perhaps evidence also of a certain natural vocation, that when I came to choose between those two it was the living that had to go.

It is also amusing to me to remember that when I announced to Rossetti that the time had come for me to cut away from business, and to sink or swim in an effort to live by my pen, having no literary connections at that time that were safe for sixpence, it was he—he who had predicted such certain success for me—that was

thrown into a state of the greatest alarm. But even Rossetti's alarm did not alarm me; and, spurred, perhaps, by secret and increasing fear of a disease from which more than one member of my family had died, I left my architectural employment rather abruptly, as I now see, notwithstanding various kind overtures from James Bromley, my employer and my friend.

On seeing that I was fully resolved to burn my boats, Rossetti proposed that I should pitch my tent with him in London.

"I feel greatly interested," he said, "in your prospects and intentions, and at this writing I can see no likelihood of my not remaining in the mind that, in case of your coming to London, your quarters should be taken up here. The house is big enough for two, even if they meant to be strangers to each other. You would have your own rooms, and we should meet just when we pleased. You have got a sufficient inkling of my exceptional habits not to be scared by them. It is true, at times my health and spirits are variable, but I am sure we should not be squabbling."

I hesitated to take advantage of such a one-sided arrangement as Rossetti proposed, and in order to overcome my reluctance he began to protest that he, too, was far from well, and

that my presence in his house might be helpful in various ways.

"You must not be anxious on my account," he said. "But any cause whatever which should bring you (but not to your own injury) to my door would be welcome in result."

The truth was, however, though I little thought it, that while my illness was slight and merely temporary, with youth to banish it, Rossetti's was serious and fated to follow him to the end. During the first half of 1881 he had been collecting, revising, and finally printing and correcting the proofs of his second volume of poems; carrying on (through me) a rather difficult correspondence relating to the sale of his picture, "Dante's Dream," to the Corporation of Liverpool; and (through Watts-Dunton) another vexatious correspondence about the renewal of the lease of his house in Chelsea and the loss of the large garden at the back which had for years been his sole ground for fresh air and exercise. Besides these causes of worry there had been another and yet more insidious enemy at work in undermining Rossetti's health—the drug in which, partly as the consequence of increasing anxieties, he was now, unknown to his friends, exceeding terribly.

So it came about that, when I had left Liverpool and gone up to Cumberland, resolved, if I shook off my trouble, to toil early hours and late and live in a cottage on oatmeal porridge and barley bread rather than give up my intention of becoming a man of letters, Rossetti, also influenced by considerations of health, came to the conclusion that if I would not come to him he must go to me. Scarcely had I settled in my remote quarters when he wrote that he must soon leave London; that he was wearied out and unable to sleep; that if he could only reach my secluded vale he would breathe a purer air, mentally as well as physically.

"They are now really setting about the building at the back here. I do not know what my plans may be. Suppose I were to ask you to come to town in a fortnight from now, and perhaps I returning with you for a while into the country—would that be feasible to you?"

The idea of my going up to London and bringing Rossetti back with me to Cumberland became a settled scheme, and toward the beginning of August he wrote:

"I will hope to see you in town on Saturday next, unless an earlier day suits decidedly better. We will then set sail in one boat. I am rather anxious as to having become perfectly

deaf on the right side of my head. Partial approaches to this have sometimes occurred to me and passed away, so I will not be too much troubled. . . . I am getting cleared out the rooms for your reception."

In due course I arrived in London, and was received with the utmost warmth. The cheery "Hulloa" greeted me again as I entered the studio, and then Rossetti, feebler of step, I thought, than before, led the way to the apartments he had prepared for me.

My sitting-room was the room to the left of the hall facing the green dining-room, with a huge sofa and two huge chairs in an apple-blossom chintz, a table, a black oak cabinet, and a number of small photographs of Rossetti's pictures in plain oak frames. It had been occupied in turn by Mr. Meredith and by Mr. Swinburne in the days when they had lived under the same roof with Rossetti, and now it was to be mine for my permanent home in London. In this way I drifted into my place as Rossetti's housemate, and very soon I realised what the position involved.

CHAPTER V

ROSSETTI AND HIS FRIENDS

ROSSETTI was now a changed man. He was distinctly less inclined to corpulence, his eyes were less bright, and when he walked to and fro in the studio, as it was his habit to do at intervals of about an hour, it was with a laboured side-long motion that I had not previously observed. Half sensible of an anxiety which I found it difficult to conceal, he paused for an instant in the midst of these melancholy perambulations and asked how he struck me as to health. More frankly than wisely, I answered, "Less well than formerly." It was an unlucky remark, for Rossetti's secret desire at that moment was to conceal his lowering state even from himself.

He had written his "King's Tragedy" since I had stayed with him before, and I think he wished me to believe that the emotional strain involved in the production of the poem had been chiefly to blame for his reduced condition.

Casting himself on the couch with a look of exhaustion, he told me that the ballad had taken a great deal out of him. "It was as though my life ebbed out with it," he said. Undoubtedly the weight of his work was still upon him. Even his voice seemed to have lost something in quality, and to have diminished in compass also, for when he spoke he conveyed the idea of speaking as much to himself as to me.

In actual fact, however, making allowances for the strain of work as well as the worry of domestic disturbances, his physical retrogression was undoubtedly due in great part to recent excess in the use of the pernicious drug. With that excess had come a certain moral as well as bodily decline. I thought I perceived that he was more than ever enslaved by the painful delusions I have spoken of, more than ever under the influence of intermittent waves of morbid suspicion of nearly everybody with whom he came in contact.

Right or wrong, this diagnosis of Rossetti's case was perhaps the one thing that enabled me, as a young fellow out of the fresh air of the commonplace world, to do the poet some good, to cheer and strengthen him, and to bring for a time a little happiness into his life. Down to the moment of my coming he had for years

rarely been outside the doors of his great, gloomy house, certainly never afoot, and only in closed carriages with his friends; but on the second night of my stay I marched boldly into the studio, hat in hand, announced my intention of taking a walk on the Chelsea Embankment, and, without a qualm, asked Rossetti to accompany me. To my amazement, he consented, saying:

"Well—upon my word—really I think I will," and every night for a week afterward I induced him to repeat the unfamiliar experiment.

But now I recall with emotion and some remorse the scene and circumstance of those nightly walks: the Embankment, almost dark with its gas lamps far apart, and generally silent at our late hour except for an occasional footfall on the pavement under the tall houses opposite; the black river flowing noiselessly behind the low wall and gurgling under the bridge; and then Rossetti, in his slouch hat with its broad brim pulled down low on his forehead, as if to conceal his face, lurching along with a heavy, uncertain step, breathing audibly, looking at nothing and hardly speaking at all. From these nightly perambulations he would return home utterly exhausted, and, throwing

himself on the couch, remain prostrate for nearly an hour.

I seem to remember that on one of our walks along the Embankment late at night we passed in the half-darkness two figures which bore a certain resemblance to our own—an old man in a Scotch plaid, accompanied by a slight young woman in a sort of dolman. The old man was forging along sturdily with the help of a stick, and the young woman appeared to be making some effort to keep pace with him. It was Carlyle with his niece, and I caught but one glimpse of them as, out on the same errand as ourselves, they went off in the other direction.

Although it was understood between us that I had come up to London with the express purpose of taking Rossetti back with me to Cumberland, he seemed to be in no hurry for our departure. Day by day and week by week, with all the ingenuity of his native irresolution, he devised reasons for delay, and thus a month passed before we began to make a move. Meantime we commenced our career together under the same roof, and to me it was both interesting and helpful. Rossetti's habits of life were, indeed, as he said, exceptional, and in some respects they seemed to turn the world topsy-

turvy. I am convinced that at this time only the necessity of securing a certain short interval of daylight by which it was possible to paint prevailed with him to get up before the middle of the afternoon. Rising about noon and breakfasting in his little ante-room (an enormous breakfast of six eggs and half a dozen kidneys), he would come down to the studio and sit steadily at his easel for three or four hours, with two or three intervals of perhaps a quarter of an hour each for walking to and fro.

"I believe in doing a little work every day, and doing it as well as I can," he would say.

When the light began to fail he would come to my sitting-room to see how I was "getting along," an errand which invariably resulted in our going back together to the studio and talking until dinner-time.

His talk at this period was hardly ever personal. I was now (by the invitation of Alderman Samuelson) preparing a course of lectures to be delivered in Liverpool during the winter, and our conversation was nearly always on the subject of my studies. This was the prose literature of the latter half of the eighteenth century in England (chiefly Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, and De Foe), and Rossetti threw himself into my work with as much ardour as if it

had been his own. I remember that he did not strike me as particularly well read in fiction, but he had a faculty I had never seen in anybody else—the faculty of knowing things without taking the trouble to learn them, of seeing things without looking at them, of understanding things without thinking of them—a faculty beyond and apart from talent, and having little or nothing to do with industry. Remembering the bright light of Rossetti's intellect, I am by no means sure that of all men of genius I have ever known he did not stand alone.

We dined about half-past eight, generally in the studio and often without company, sat up till two or three, and then went to bed with volumes of "Clarissa" or "Tom Jones."

Nights of such loneliness were frequently broken, however, by the society of Rossetti's friends, and during the weeks of our waiting I came to know one by one the few men and women who remained of the poet's intimate circle. There was his brother William, a staid and rather silent man, at that time in the civil service, growing elderly and apparently encompassed by family cares, but coming to Cheyne Walk every Monday night with unfailing regularity and a brotherly loyalty that never flagged. There was Theodore Watts (Watts-Dunton),

most intimate of Rossetti's friends, a short man, then in the prime of life, with a great head and brilliant eyes. There was Frederic Shields, the painter, on the sunny side of middle age, enthusiastic, spontaneous, almost spasmodic. There was William Bell Scott, poet and painter, very emotional, very sensitive, a little inclined to bitterness, a tall old man who had lost his hair and wore a wig which somewhat belied his face. There was Ford Madox Brown, a handsome, elderly man with a long, whitening beard, a solid figure, with a firm step, a dignified manner, and a sententious style of speech. Then there was William Sharp, a young fellow in his early twenties, very bright, very winsome, very lively, very lovable, very Scotch, always telling in what Rossetti called "the unknown tongue" exaggerated and incredible stories which made him laugh uproariously, but were never intended to be believed. And then there was the blind poet, Philip Bourke Marston, a pathetic figure, slack and untidy, with large lips and pale cheeks, silent, gloomy, and perhaps morbid.

These constituted the inner circle of Rossetti's friends, and they came at varying intervals: Watts twice or thrice a week, Shields more rarely, Brown on the occasions of his

holidays in London from his work on the frescoes in the Town Hall at Manchester, Sharp and Marston now and then. Besides these, there were calls from a few of the buyers of Rossetti's pictures, chief among them being Frederick Leyland, a remarkable man, tall and stylish, almost showy, very clever and keen. And once or twice during the weeks of our waiting there were visits from the ladies of Rossetti's family: his mother, a gentle, sweet-faced old lady in a long sealskin coat (the treasured gift of the poet), and his sister Christina, a woman in middle life with a fine, intellectual face, noticeably large and somewhat protrusive eyes, a pleasant smile and a quiet manner, but a power of clear-cut, incisive speech which gave an astonishing effect of mental strength. Finally, there were rare and valued visits from Mrs. William Morris, the subject of many of Rossetti's pictures, no longer young but still wondrously beautiful, with the grand, sad face which the painter has made immortal in those three-quarter-length pictures which for wealth of sublime and mysterious suggestion, unaided by dramatic design, are probably, as Watts-Dunton says, "unique in the art of the world."

Naturally it could not be altogether a desolate house in which such men and women

revolved at intervals around one of the most extraordinary personalities of the age, and notwithstanding the gradual lowering of Rossetti's health, we had our cheerful hours together from time to time. I recall the dinners in the studio, in the midst of the easels, the game of "Limericks" sometimes played about the table, everybody taking his turn (the unhappy subject being usually the friend who had not turned up), and the peals of laughter that rang through the room as Rossetti's rhyme, aflame with satire that was not always without the power to scorch, fell on us like a thunderbolt. I recall, too, the quieter evenings, when Rossetti and Watts together, with a friendliness I can never forget, talked for long hours on the literary subjects that were at the moment most interesting to me.

Not many echoes of the outer world came to us in that closed circle of Rossetti's house, for there was a kind of silent acquiescence in the idea that the affairs of everyday life were proscribed. I cannot remember that we talked politics at all, or that a daily newspaper ever entered our doors. A criminal trial, with a mystery attached to it, would awaken Rossetti's keenest interest, and set his amazing powers of deduction to work, but social movements had

small value in his eyes, and even religious agitations rarely moved him. I remember that a little of my native Puritanism took me one Sunday morning to hear Spurgeon, the great Nonconformist preacher, at the moment when he was in the fires of what was called his "downgrade" crusade, but I tried in vain to interest Rossetti in the burning propaganda.

Literary doings, however, and in a less degree artistic ones, also, commanded Rossetti's attention always, for his house was a hot-bed of intellectual activity, and I recall in particular his anxiety to know what was being published and discussed. A young poet, who was just then attracting attention by certain peculiarities of personal behaviour and a series of cartoons in which he was caricatured by Du Maurier in *Punch*, sent Rossetti his first book of poems, a volume bound in parchment and inscribed, I think, in gold. This was Oscar Wilde, and I remember Rossetti's quick recognition of the gifts that underlay a good deal of amusing affectation.

The air was at that time full of stories of Whistler's pecuniary distresses, and I remember, too, a string of ridiculous anecdotes which Rossetti used to tell of "Jimmy's" eccentricities. Then there was Swinburne, a figure that

seemed to be always hovering about Rossetti's house (though during my time his body was never present there), so constantly was he discussed either by Watts, by Rossetti, or by myself. But of other and still more intimate friends of earlier life—Ruskin, Morris, Holman Hunt, and Burne-Jones—nothing was seen and hardly anything was said, and of this fact I can offer no explanation—none, at least, except by side-light derived from Rossetti's great love and frequent repetition of Coleridge's "Work Without Hope," with its—

> Sloth jaundiced all, and from my graspless hand
> Drop friendship's precious pearls like hour-glass sand.

Two events of much importance during our month in London might have been expected to awaken Rossetti to the keenest interest in life. After lengthy negotiations, measureless correspondence, countless interviews, and the exercise of some tact and diplomacy to meet and defeat the obstacles which Rossetti's pride or personal antagonism had been constantly putting in the way, I succeeded in selling the great "Dante's Dream" to Liverpool. The picture was exhibited immediately, and at first there was a certain amount of criticism in the local newspapers, a certain carping at the Corpora-

tion for the peculiarities of its purchase, but Rossetti heard nothing of that. All he heard were the rapturous praises of the few who subscribed to Noel Paton's opinion that his "Dante" was one of the half dozen great pictures of the world, and all he knew besides was that one morning I took to his bedroom a cheque for the fifteen hundred guineas that were the price paid by Liverpool.

His second volume of poems, also, "Ballads and Sonnets," was published during our weeks of waiting, and if, once again, there was at first a measure of adverse criticism, Rossetti, in his failing health, was allowed to know nothing about that, either. All he saw in the name of criticism was a noble and brilliant appreciation by Watts-Dunton (*Athenæum*), which, as I remember, brought the tears to his eyes when he read it; a fine analysis by Professor Dowden (*Academy*), and an article, all affection and emotion, by myself. Beyond this, and the general impression we all conveyed to him that his book was having a magnificent reception, Rossetti had no other knowledge of the fate of his new book than came to him in the substantial form of his publishers' cheques.

Rossetti might have been expected to find joy in the fact that in one month, by the simultane-

ous production of two masterpieces, he had again become illustrious in two arts, but it would wrong the truth to say that he gave any particular sign of satisfaction. I cannot recall that he showed a real interest in the reception of his picture, or that the fate of his new book gave him a moment's apparent uneasiness.

If I had not heard of the feverish watchfulness with which he had followed the fortunes of his earlier volume, I should have concluded that the absence of anxiety about his second book was due to a calm reliance on its strength. But the intensity of Rossetti's sensitiveness to any breath of criticism was as great as ever, and it is more than probable that the same shrinking from public observation which had made him a hermit made him shut out of his consciousness any influence that might possibly bring him pain.

I remember that one morning, not long after the publication of the book, coming unexpectedly into my sitting-room and seeing on the table a copy of a well-known weekly journal lying open at a page in which some purblind person, reviewing the "Ballads," began, "It is difficult to determine exactly what position the author of these poems fills in the category of secondary poets," Rossetti fired up at me for

" shunting his enemies into his house," and then went off to his studio in a towering rage. The unlucky article was no doubt foolish enough as criticism in a leading place of a book which gave proof of one of the great poets of the century, but I thought it was necessary to look elsewhere than to the natural irritability of the poetic nature for the reason of Rossetti's want of manliness in meeting with one more evidence of the perpetual presence of the egregious ass.

Unfortunately, it was not necessary to look far. Day by day, or night by night, prompted perhaps by the desire to suppress the nervousness created by his domestic worries, the sale of his pictures, and the publication of his book, Rossetti was giving way more and more to indulgence in his accursed drug, and not all our efforts to keep painful facts from his knowledge, nor yet our innocent scheming to fill his gloomy house with sunshine, availed to bring any real happiness into his life.

I remember that one day his brother William's wife (a daughter of Madox Brown) sent her children to Cheyne Walk on a visit to their uncle, thinking, no doubt, to brighten him up by their cheerful presence; but beyond a momentary welcome from the poet as he sat in the studio, and a constrained greeting from the

little ones, nothing came of the innocent artifice, and Rossetti heard no more of them than their happy laughter as they romped through the rest of the house.

August had slid into September while we waited in London without obvious purpose, and it was now plainly apparent to all Rossetti's friends that out of regard both to the condition of his health and the time of the year, he must go back to Cumberland with me immediately if he was to go at all. Once out of this atmosphere of gloom, of anxiety, and of irritation, we thought his spirits would revive and his physical weakness disappear.

Infinite were the efforts that had to be made, and countless the precautions that had to be taken, before Rossetti could be induced to set out; but at length, after a farewell visit to Torrington Square, to say good-bye to his mother and sister, we found ourselves—we two and the nurse—at 9 P.M., one evening in September, at Euston Station, sitting behind the drawn blinds of a special saloon carriage that was labelled for Keswick, and packed with as many baskets and bags, as many books and artist's trappings, as would have lasted for an absence of a year.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST WEEKS IN THE VALE OF ST. JOHN

TO paint a portrait of Rossetti as he was when I lived with him in the last year of his life is to present a very complex personality, having many conflicting impulses, many contradictory manifestations; and if, by any revelation of truth, I can account for the want of harmony in the poet's character, and in the impressions it made upon observers, I shall perhaps do something to recover the real Rossetti from the misrepresentations of the detractors who hated him and of the admirers who did not understand him.

I have not concealed my conviction that the less noble side of Rossetti came of prolonged indulgence in a pernicious drug, and once again I cannot omit an illustration of the corrupting influence of his unfortunate habit. Our journey to Cumberland was long and tiresome. The man who could not sleep in a muffled bedroom fronting an open garden was hardly likely to

sleep in a rumbling and jolting railway train. But toward midnight I gave Rossetti his usual dose and went to sleep.

I awoke when the train stopped at Penrith, and the dawn was breaking, but Rossetti was still lying where I had left him. Something suggested that I should look in my handbag, and to my distress I discovered that one of the two bottles of chloral had gone.

It was six o'clock when we reached the little wayside station (Threlkeld) that was the end of our journey, and there we got into a carriage which was to drive us through the Vale of St. John to the Legberthwaite end of it. The morning was calm; the mountains looked grand and noble with the mists floating over their crowns; nothing could be heard but the call of awakening cattle, the rumble of the cataracts that were far away, and the surge of the rivers that were near. Rossetti was all but indifferent to our surroundings, or displayed only such fitful interest in them as must have been affected out of kindly desire to please me. He said the chloral I had given him on the journey was in his eyes, so that he could not rightly see, and as soon as we reached the house that was to be our home, he declared his intention of going to bed.

I saw him to his room and then left him immediately, perceiving he was anxious to dismiss me; but, returning a moment afterward with some urgent message, I opened his door without knocking and came suddenly upon him in the act of drinking the contents of the bottle of chloral I had missed from the bag.

It would be impossible for me, even now at this distance of time, to convey any sense of the crushing humiliation of this incident, of the abject degradation which the habit of chloral had brought about in an ingenuous, frank, and noble nature. It was not then, however, that Rossetti himself had any consciousness of this. Indeed, I thought there was even something almost cruel in the laugh with which he received my nervous protest; but afterward, when the effects of the drug were gone and he realised the pain he had caused, the fear he had created, the hours I had walked on tiptoe in the corridor outside his door, listening for the sound of his breathing, in terror lest it should stop, the true man showed himself, the real Rossetti, and he said (as he did again and again on other occasions):

"I wish you were really my son, for, though I should have no right to treat you so, I should

at least have some reason to expect your forgiveness."

Although he had consumed since we left London a quantity of chloral that would have been sufficient to destroy, perhaps, all the other members of our little household put together, Rossetti awoke fresh and in good spirits toward the middle of the afternoon, breakfasted heartily, and then took a turn about the house which was intended to be our home for at least a couple of months to come.

It was a modest place called Fisher Ghyll, having a guest house in front consisting of three sitting-rooms and as many bedrooms, and a group of farm buildings at the back. Standing in what may be called the estuary of the valley, where the Vale of St. John empties into the dale of Thirlmere, it had the purple heights of Blencathra to the north, the scraggy rocks of the Dunmail Raise to the south, the Styx Pass and the brant sides of Helvellyn beside it, and before it the wooded slopes of Golden Howe, the climbing road to Keswick and the pathway of the setting sun. Not a sound about the house except the occasional voice of a child or bark of a dog, the plash of falling water, the bleating of sheep, the echo of the axe of the woodman who was thinning the neighbouring

plantation, and the hum of the mail-coach that passed morning and evening from the little market town five miles away.

Rossetti was delighted. Here, at least, he might bury the memory of a hundred "bogies" that had vexed him; here, in this exhilarating air, he might recover the health he had lost in the close atmosphere of his studio in London, and here, too, amidst the vivid scenery, so wonderfully awakening to the imagination, so full of poetic appeal and ghostly legend, he might turn again to the romantic ballad which he had expected to write among such surroundings.

Next day he was exceptionally well, and astounded me by the proposal that we should ascend Golden Howe together—the little mountain of perhaps a thousand feet that stands at the head of Thirlmere. With never a hope on my part of reaching the top, we set out for that purpose, but weak as he had been a few days before, Rossetti actually accomplished the task he proposed for himself, going up slowly, little by little, through the ferns and the fir-trees, with their rabbits and red-tailed squirrels, and then sitting for a long hour on the summit. It was a marvellous picture that lay about us, with the lake below and the undulating mountain tops above, and Rossetti was much impressed.

"I'm not one of those who care about scenery, but this is wonderful and the colour is wonderful," he said.

His spirits were high, and when on beginning our descent he lost his footing and slithered some distance through the bracken before I could stop him, he only laughed and said:

"Don't be afraid. I always go up on my feet, and come down on a broader basis."

He painted a little during those first quiet days in Cumberland, not having touched a brush for some time before we left London, and I found it a pleasure to watch a picture growing under his masterly hand from the first warm ground that was made to cover the canvas before his subject was begun to the last indefinable change in one of his idealised women's faces, cold in their loveliness, unsubstantial in their passion, tainted with the melancholy that clings to the purest beauty. Naturally he had no models, and speaking of that drawback, he said:

"It's wonderful what a bit of nature will do for you when you can get it in"; but he also said something about style being injured by a slavish submission to fact.

I remember that I asked him what was the reason he had never painted the great dramatic compositions he had designed in earlier years—

the "Hamlet," the "Cassandra," and, above all, the "Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee"—and he answered with a laugh:

"Bread and butter, my boy—that was the reason. I had to paint what I could sell. But I'll tell you something," he added quickly. "I like best to paint a picture that shall boil the pot and yet be no pot-boiler."

The days were already short, the nights were long. Rossetti could not read with ease by lamplight or sleep until the small hours of the morning, and so it came about that during our first cheerful weeks in Cumberland he threw himself with great ardour into my own occupations. I was still preparing my lectures on prose literature, and to fortify myself for my work I was reading the masterpieces over again. Seeing this, Rossetti suggested that I should read them aloud, and I did so.

Many an evening we passed in this way. It lives in my memory both as a sweet and a sad experience. Behind our little farm house was the lowest pool of a ghyll, and the roar of the falling waters could be heard from within. On the farther side of the vale there were black crags where ravens lived, and in the unseen bed of the dale between lay the dark waters of Thirlmere. The surroundings were impres-

sive enough to eye and ear in the daylight, but when night came, and the lamps were lit and the curtains were drawn, and darkness covered everything outside, they were awesome and grim.

I remember those evenings with gratitude and some pain. The little oblong sitting-room, the dull thud of the waterfall like distant thunder overhead, the crackle of the wood fire, myself reading aloud, and Rossetti, in his long sack coat, his hands thrust deep in his upright pockets, walking with his heavy and uncertain step to and fro, to and fro, laughing sometimes his big, deep laugh, and sometimes sitting down to wipe his moist spectacles and clear his dim eyes. Not rarely the dead white gleams of the early dawn before the coming of the sun met the yellow light of our candles as we passed on the staircase, going to bed, a little window that looked up to the mountains, and over them to the east.

Perhaps it was not all pleasure even, so far as I was concerned, but certainly it was all profit. The novels we read were "Tom Jones," in four volumes, and "Clarissa," in its original eight, one or two of Smollett's and some of Scott's. Rossetti had not, I think, been a great reader of English fiction (French he knew bet-

ter), but his critical judgment on novels was in some respects the surest and soundest I have ever known. Nothing escaped him. His alert mind seized upon everything. He had never before, I think, given any thought to fiction as an art, but his intellect played over it like a bright light. It amazes me now, after twenty years' close study of the methods of story-telling, to recall the general principles which he seemed to formulate out of the back of his head for the defence of his swift verdicts.

"Now, why?" I would say, when the art of the novelist seemed to me to fail in imaginative grip.

"Because so-and-so must happen," Rossetti would answer.

He was always right. He grasped with masterly strength the operation of the two fundamental factors in the novelist's art—the sympathy and the "tragic mischief." If these were not working well, he knew by the end of the first chapters that, however fine in observation or racy in humour or true in pathos, the work as an organism must fail.

It was an education in itself to sharpen one's wits on such a grindstone, to clarify one's thoughts in such a stream, to strengthen one's imagination by contact with a mind that was

of "imagination all compact"; but how did Rossetti, who had spent his energies on two other arts, know the things that are hidden for all time from nine-tenths of the professional guides to fiction? What explanation is possible except the one I have given before, that Rossetti was the one man I ever met who gave me a sense of the presence of a gift that is above and apart from talent—in a word, genius?

Down to that time, when I was beginning to live in the outer courts of literature as a lecturer and as an occasional reviewer on the two literary journals, the *Athenæum* and the *Academy*, it had never occurred to me that I might write a novel. But I began to think of it then as a remote possibility, and the immediate surroundings of our daily life brought back recollections of certain Cumbrian legends. I told one of the stories to Rossetti, and he was impressed by it; yet he strongly advised me not to tackle it, because he saw no way of getting sympathy into it on any side.

"But why not try your hand at a Manx story?" he said, remembering my Manx origin. "The Bard of Manxland—it's worth while to be that."

I thought so, too, and hence Rossetti was in some sort the foster-father of the novels with

which, perhaps, more than any other efforts of mine, my name has since been associated.

Rossetti was not one of the people who live over and over again the lives they lived in their youth, but during those first cheerful weeks in Cumberland, prompted thereto by my inquiries, he talked a good deal in an easy and familiar way about the men and women he had known in earlier years. They pass before me now, as they appeared in Rossetti's graphic sketches, these people of the world he used to live in, some of them grim and lugubrious forms, slightly distorted by caricature, others rather rakish young figures out of the borderland of a somewhat boisterous Bohemia.

Not to charge Rossetti too strictly with responsibility for what comes back to me across the space of so many years, I will give a summary of his reminiscences. Thus he talked of George Eliot, then lately dead, with her long, weird, horsey face—a good woman, modest, retiring, and amiable to a fault when the outer crust of reticence had been broken through. Then of her companion, Lewes, with his shaggy eyebrows, and of how, at George Eliot's request, he had sent a photograph of his "Hamlet" when Lewes, who was a kind of amateur actor, was about to play the part.

Then he talked of Mrs. Carlyle (how much he knew of her I cannot remember) as a clever but rather bitter little woman with the one redeeming quality of unostentatious charity. "The poor of Chelsea always spoke well of her," he said. Then of Carlyle himself, with a tinge of personal dislike, telling how Bell Scott sent the Seer his first volume, "Poems of a Painter," a title which, being in florid lettering of the poet's engraving, was mistaken for "Poems of a Printer," and called forth a letter beginning, "If a printer has anything to say, why in the name of heaven doesn't he *say* it, and not sing it?"

Then of Scott walking with Carlyle on the Chelsea Embankment, and pouring out his soul in a rhapsody on Shelley, until the grim philosopher stopped him and said, "Yon man Shelley was just a scoundrel, and ought to have been hanged," a crushing blow which was atoned for a few hours afterward when there came as a present to Scott's house from Carlyle's the bust of Shelley which had been made by Mrs. Shelley and given to Leigh Hunt. Finally, of Carlyle walking with William Allingham in the neighbourhood of the Kensington Museum, and announcing his intention of writing a life of Michael Angelo, and then adding, by way of

remonstrance against his companion's quickening interest, "But, mind ye, I'll no say much about his *art*."

He talked of Browning, too, claiming to be one of the poet's first admirers, and describing him as he used to be—spruce, almost dapper, wearing gloves that seemed to have grown on his shapely hands, more than hinting that perhaps he gave himself up too much to society, and saying, "Dull dogs for the most part, those fashionable folk, yet they treat a man of genius as if he were a superior flunkey." He talked of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, too, with respect amounting almost to reverence.

Of Tennyson, also, he talked with warmth, imitating the sonorous tones of his glorious voice, but betraying a certain soreness at the recollection that, to avoid an opinion on the "Poems," the Laureate had merely acknowledged the arrival of the book. Then he told a story of Longfellow, "the good old bard"; how the poet had called on him during his visit to England and been courteous and kind in the last degree, but having fallen into the error of thinking that Rossetti the painter and Rossetti the poet were different men, he had said, on leaving the house:

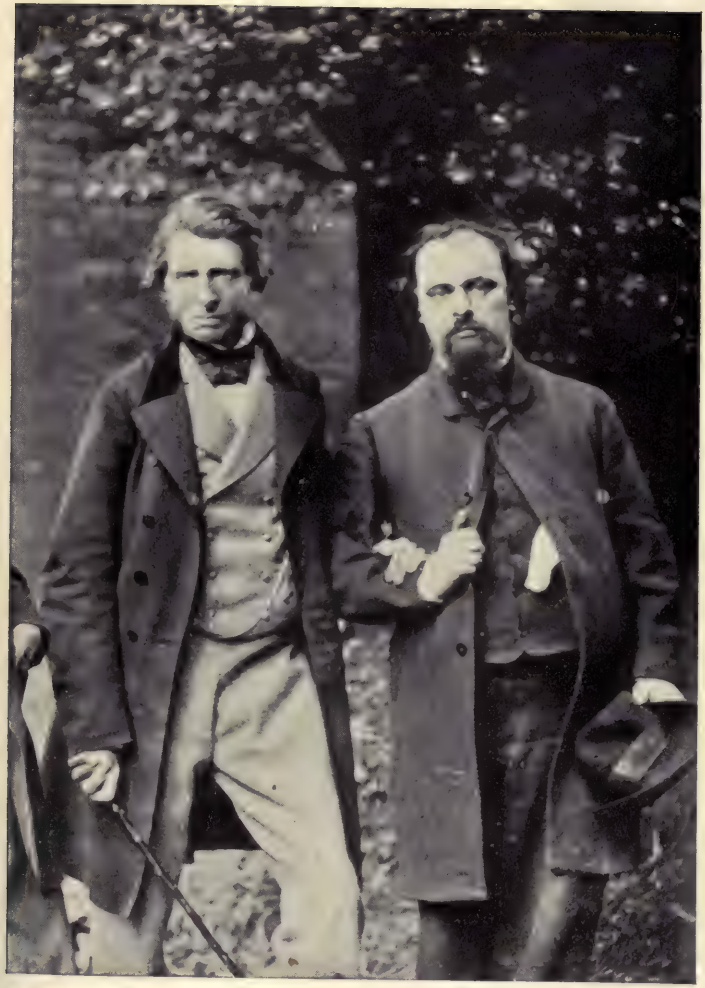
"I have been very glad to meet you, Mr.

Rossetti, and should like to have met your brother also. Pray tell him how much I admire his beautiful poem, 'The Blessed Damozel.'"

Rossetti's talk about Ruskin was, I thought, curiously contradictory in tone and feeling, being sometimes tender, generous, highly appreciative, and warmly affectionate, and sometimes grudging and even hostile, as when, in reply to something I had said about a difference with Madox Brown on the subject of Ruskin's economic propaganda, he said:

"Brown is one of the most naturally and genially gifted talkers I know, but that mention of yours of the biggest of all big R's was just the unluckiest thing you could have said. And I myself think that the talk from and about that particular Capital Letter is already enough for several universes, only don't say I said so, as he is an old acquaintance."

If, after so many years, both Rossetti and Ruskin being dead, I disregard the warning of these last words, it is only to say that always in the talk of the one about the other there was this note of desire to avoid the appearance of disloyalty to a friend of former years who was a friend no longer. I should have said that there had been a short period in which Ruskin



Ruskin and Rossetti.

and Rossetti had been on terms of the closest intimacy, and that an estrangement had followed that was due merely to that gradual asundering which is more fatal to friendship than the most violent quarrel. The period of intimacy had apparently covered the most tragic moment of Ruskin's life, for I recall a story which Rossetti told of the dark days of his friend's marriage and separation.

Ruskin and his wife had gone up, I think, to Scotland, and there Millais had joined them with the object of painting a picture. The picture represented the author standing at the foot of a waterfall, and when it was finished it became Ruskin's property, and he took it back with him to London. Then the storm cloud burst which separated Ruskin from his wife and gave her to his friend, whereupon Ruskin's father, thinking he saw in the portrait of his son the first indications of a malign intent, wished to put his penknife through the picture. But Ruskin himself, whose love of a work of art was greater than his hatred of the artist, smuggled the incriminating canvas into a cab and carried it off to Rossetti's studio, begging that it should be hidden away until his father's anger had cooled.

Brighter and better, however, because more

easy and familiar, than Rossetti's talk of the people who had stood a little apart from him were his sketches of his own particular circle in the days of their beginnings in art and literature, when all the world was young: of Swinburne, with his small body and great head, full of modern revolutionary fire and the courage of an ancient morality whereof his personal conduct was as innocent as a child's; of Burne-Jones, with his delicate face, and eyes that were alight with dreams, a strong soul in a frail body, a sword too keen for the scabbard; of Morris ("Topsy," he called him), with his rather rugged Scandinavian personality, writing some of the "Earthly Paradise," I think, at Cheyne Walk, and declaiming it aloud from a balcony at the back, to the consternation of the neighbours who saw a shock-headed man shouting at nothing in the garden below; of Millais, something of a "swell"; of Holman Hunt, more humbly born, with himself in a social condition somewhere between; of Madox Brown, with his sense of personal dignity and his respect for the proprieties, sometimes outraged by Rossetti's utter disregard of appearances, as when, out together in Holborn, Rossetti stopped at a potato stall on the pavement, bought two pennyworth of roasted potatoes,

and ate them as he walked along, while Brown, in high dudgeon, walked parallel with him on the other side of the street.

Then there were Rossetti's sketches of the bright days at Oxford, when the group of young artists were painting the frescoes in the Union debating room, being always in want of female models and daily discovering "stunners." And finally, there were faint glimpses of almost fatal flirtations on that borderland of a rather boisterous Bohemia when Rossetti, in his tumultuous youth, walking in Vauxhall gardens, came upon a bouncing girl fresh from the country, with a great mass of the red hair he loved to paint, cracking nuts with her white teeth and throwing the shells at him.

Pale phantoms of the figures that floated through Rossetti's stories of these earlier years, how they rise around me! And if I present them now, it is as witnesses to the cheerful mood of the poet during those first weeks in Cumberland rather than as wraiths to be challenged too literally after moving in my memory through so many years.

The change of air and scene had apparently made the most astonishing improvement in Rossetti's health, and we began to encourage hopes of a complete recovery. It was a splen-

did dream, full of great possibilities for the future. After all, he was only fifty-three years of age, and he had a world of work in his heart and brain which he had hardly attempted to realise. Thus we nourished our glorious hopes, and I think there were moments when even Rossetti himself appeared to share them.

CHAPTER VII

LAST WEEKS IN THE VALE OF ST. JOHN

OUR dream was not to be realised. After a while Rossetti's physical vigour became sensibly less, and his spirits declined rapidly. He painted very little, and made no attempt to write the ballad which he had spoken of as likely to grow in the midst of our romantic surroundings. I think now that perhaps these surroundings themselves had some effect in lowering the condition of his health. Exhilarating and inspiring as the scenery of the Lake country certainly is in the cheerful days of summer, it is depressing enough when the leaves fall and the bracken withers and the deepening autumn drives long dun-coloured clouds across the valleys, cutting off the mountain tops and deadening the air as with the daily march of noiseless thunderstorms. And Rossetti seemed to feel the effect of the dying year in a country which gives one the sense of being shut in by mountain and cloud.

Once a week I had to leave him for a day and a half to fulfil my lecturing engagement in Liverpool, and the increasing earnestness with which the reticent Cumbrian dalesman, who always met me on my return with a dog-cart at the station, used to say, "You'll be welcome back, sir," told me but too plainly that Rossetti's health and spirits were sinking fast.

Week after week I brought back great stories of how the world was ringing with his praises, but save for a momentary emotion, betraying itself in a certain tremor of the voice as he said, "That's good, very good," I saw no sign of real interest in his growing fame, certainly no heartening and uplifting effect produced by it.

I tried in vain to interest him in the literary associations of the district. It was perhaps natural that Grasmere could not draw him, even though he could think of Dove Cottage not only in connection with Wordsworth (whom he did not worship), but also with De Quincey and that Eastern opium-eater who perhaps wandered out of a distempered imagination into that secluded dale. I could not get him to go with me to Keswick, only five miles away, to look at Greta Hall, sacred to the memory of Southey's stainless life, or at the cottage on

Castlerigg, where Shelley ("as mad there as anywhere else, madder he could not be") struggled with the burglars and chased the ghosts, and not even Borrowdale, scene of the second part of "Christabel," could draw him to the cliffs that had been rent asunder in the passage he liked the best of the poet he admired the most.

Even his daily walks became shorter day by day, sometimes as far as to the "Nag's Head," on the south or the mouth of the valley road on the north, but generally no more than a few hundred yards along the high-road to right or left, ending too frequently in a long rest on the grass, however damp from dew or rain.

If Rossetti's days were now cheerless and heavy, what shall I say of the nights? At that time of the year the night closed in as early as seven o'clock, and then in that little house among the solitary hills his disconsolate spirit would sometimes sink beyond solace into irreclaimable depths of depression. Night after night we sat up until eleven, twelve, one, and two o'clock, watching the long hours go by with heavy steps, waiting, waiting, waiting for the time at which he could take his first draught of chloral, drop back on to his pillow, and snatch three or four hours of dreamless sleep.

In order to break the monotony of such nights, Rossetti would sometimes recite. His memory was marvellous, and he could remember every line of his own two volumes, as well as long passages from other poets. Thus, with failing voice, he would again and again attempt, at my request, his great "Cloud Confines," or stanzas from "The King's Tragedy," and repeatedly, also, Poe's "Ulalume" and "Raven." Even yet I can hear the deep boom of his barytone, rolling out like an organ that seemed to shake the walls of the little room—

> "'Twas then the moon sailed clear of the rack
> On high in her hollow dome."

And I can hear, too, the panting breath that too often followed on his exertions as he stopped in his perambulations to and fro and sank into a chair.

It was perhaps natural enough that in this condition of health and spirits, amid surroundings which I now see were entirely wrong for him, though I had been chiefly responsible for them, the craving for the chloral should increase. Not soon shall I forget some of my experiences in that relation, and if I tell the story of one of them, and for the last time

lay bare the infirmity (already well known and much misunderstood) of the great man who was my intimate friend, it shall only be to show how the noblest nature may be corrupted, the largest soul made small by indulgence in a damnable drug.

I have said that on the night I first slept at Cheyne Walk, Rossetti, coming into my room at the last moment before going to bed, told me that he had just taken sixty grains of chloral, that in four hours he would take sixty more, and four later yet another sixty. Whether there was a conscious exaggeration or whether (being incapable of affectation or untruthfulness) he was deceived by his doctors for the good purpose of operating to advantage on his all-potent imagination, I do not know, but I do know that when the chloral came under my own control I was strictly warned that one bottle at one dose was all that it was necessary or safe for Rossetti to take. This single bottle (by Dr. Marshall's advice) I gave him on going to bed, and we made the hour of retiring as late as possible so that when he awoke it might be day.

But the power of the dose was now decreasing rapidly, and hence it came to pass that toward four o'clock, in the leaden light of early

dawn, Rossetti would come to my room and beg for more. Let those who never knew Rossetti censure me, if they think well, for yielding at last to his pathetic importunities. The low, pleading voice, the note of pain, the awful sense of a body craving rest and a brain praying for unconsciousness—they are with me even yet in my memories of the man sitting on the side of my bed and asking for my pity and my forgiveness.

These were among the moments when Rossetti was utterly irresistible, but to compromise with my conscience I would give him half a bottle more and he would go off with an appearance of content. The result was disastrous enough, but in a way that might have been least expected.

I was already painfully aware of the corroding influence of the drug on Rossetti's better nature, and one morning, as I took out of its hiding-place the key that was to open the glass doors of the little cabinet which contained the chloral, I caught a look in his eyes which seemed to say that in future he would find it for himself. To meet the contingency, and at the same time to test a theory which I had begun to cherish, that the drug was only necessary to Rossetti because he believed it to be so, I de-

cided to try an experiment, and so defeat by a trick the trick I expected.

The solution of chloral was hardly distinguishable at any time from pure water, and certainly not at all in the dead white light of dawn, so, with the connivance of the nurse, I opened a bottle, emptied it of the drug, filled it afresh with water, corked and covered it again with its parchment cap tied about with its collar of red string, placed it in the cabinet, and then awaited results.

Next morning I awoke of myself exactly at the hour at which Rossetti had been accustomed to awaken me, and I heard him coming as noiselessly as he could down the corridor toward my room. He opened the door, leaned over me to satisfy himself that I was asleep, fumbled for and found the key to the cabinet, opened it, took away the bottle I had left ready for him, and then crept back to bed. After some ten minutes or more I rose and went to his room to see what had occurred, and there, sure enough, lay Rossetti, sleeping soundly, and my bottle of water standing empty on the table by his side.

In my ignorance, I imagined I had solved the problem of Rossetti's insomnia (of nearly all insomnia), and found the remedy for half

the troubles of his troubled life. He was indeed "of imagination all compact," and if we could only continue to make him think he was consuming chloral while he was really drinking water, we should in good time conquer his baneful habit altogether.

What the result might have been of any consistent attempt to put my theory into practice it is not possible for me to say, for fate was stronger than good intentions and my experiment was not to be repeated. While I was out walking the next morning the nurse told the whole story to Rossetti in a well-meant but foolish attempt to triumph over his melancholy, and then more mischief was done than the mischief we had tried to undo.

Besides the crushing humiliation that came to him with the consciousness of the lowering of his moral nature from the use of the drug, and of our being so obviously aware of it, there was the fact that from that day forward he believed we were always deceiving him, and that what we gave him for chloral was mainly water. As if to establish my theory that Rossetti's body answered entirely to the mood of his mind, sleep from that day forward refused to come to him at all after the single bottle which the doctor had prescribed. Then the dose

had, of necessity, to be increased; and when, in alarm at the consequences, I refused to go farther, Rossetti resorted to other aids to induce sleep that chloral of itself would not bring.

It was impossible that such a condition of things should last, and it was with unspeakable relief that I heard Rossetti express a desire to go back to London. Before that the nurse had already gone, and I had for some little time been alone with the poet. Correspondence he had always kept up with the friends of his immediate circle, with his brother William, with Watts, and, I think, with Shields, and this had brought a constant flow of interests into his life; but now he was becoming more and more dependent upon personal company that should not fail him, and never for an hour now could he bear to be alone. Strange enough it seemed that the man who for so many years had shunned the world and chosen solitude when he might have had society, seemed at last to grow weary of his loneliness. But so it was, and whatever the value of my own company in the days when I came up to him out of the fresh air of a widely different world, I was growing painfully aware that it was very little I could do for him now.

I had tried to check the craving for chloral, but unwittingly I had done worse than not check it, and where the lifelong efforts of older friends had failed to eradicate a morbid, ruinous, and fatal thirst it seemed presumptuous, if not ridiculous, to think that the task of conquering it could be compassed by a young fellow with heart and nerves of wax. Moreover, the whole scene was beginning to have an effect upon myself that was more personal and more serious than I have yet given hint of. The constant fret and fume of this life of baffled effort, of struggle with a deadly drug that had grown to have a separate existence in my mind as the existence of a fiend, was beginning to make me ill, and, utterly disastrous as our visit to Cumberland had been on the whole, and largely responsible as I felt for it, I jumped eagerly at the opportunity of going home.

Many were the preparations that had to be gone through again before we could make a move: easels and canvases to pack, and a special saloon carriage to bring round from the junction to our wayside platform, so that we might go up without a change, and at night—above all, at night—to avoid the distraction of day and the eyes of the people on the stations at which the train might stop. But at length,

one evening in the gathering darkness, a little more than a month after our arrival, we were back at Threlkeld in a carriage, which half an hour later was coupled at Penrith to the Scotch express to London.

Never shall I forget that journey.

Whether Rossetti took his usual dose of the drug, I cannot remember, but certainly he did not sleep, and neither did he compose himself to rest, though the lamps of the carriage were darkened by their shades. During the greater part of the night he sat up in an attitude of waiting, wearing overcoat and hat and gloves, as if our journey were to end at the next stopping-place; but at intervals he made effort to walk to and fro in the jolting saloon, as it was his habit to do in his own studio.

Hour after hour passed in this way, while the lights of the stations flashed by the curtained windows, and I looked out from time to time to see how far we had gone, how near we were to the end. The night was very long, and Rossetti's spirits were more disconsolate than I had ever known them to be before.

Undoubtedly there was enough in the circumstances of our return to London to justify the deepest depression. Rossetti had gone to Cumberland solely in the interests of his failing

health, and he was returning in far worse condition. The flicker of hope which had come with his first apparent improvement had made the sadness of his relapse more dark. In the light of subsequent events it would be impossible to say that he exaggerated the gravity of his symptoms, but it was only too clear that he thought he was going home to die.

As the hours went on he was full of lamentations, and I was making feeble efforts, over the rattle and clanging of the car, to sustain the pitiful insincerity of the comforter who has no real faith in his own comforting, for I, too, had begun to believe that the road for Rossetti was all downhill now.

It is not for me, who by virtue of the closest intimacy was permitted to see a great and unhappy man in his mood of most vehement sorrow and self-reproach, to uncover his naked soul for any purpose less sacred than that of justifying his character against misrepresentation or bringing his otherwise wayward conduct and mysterious life within the range of sympathy, and if I go farther with the story of this terrible night, it is with the hope of that result, and no other.

Rossetti's words during the hours that followed I cannot, except in broken passages, re-

call; and if I could recall them, I should not set them down, so deep was the distress with which they were spoken and the emotion with which they were heard; but I can at least indicate the impressions they left on me then, as a young man who had known no more down to that moment than most of his other friends of some of the saddest and darkest chapters of his life.

The first of those impressions was that while the long indulgence in the drug might have broken up his health and created delusions that had alienated friends, it was not that, nor yet the bitterness of malignant criticism, that had separated him from the world and destroyed the happiness of his life. The next of my impressions was that Rossetti had never forgiven himself for the weakness of yielding to the importunity of friends and the impulse of literary ambition which had led him to violate the sanctity of his wife's grave in recovering the manuscripts he had buried in it. And, above all, it was my impression that Rossetti had never ceased to reproach himself with his wife's death as an event that had been due in some degree to failure of duty on his part, or perhaps to something still graver.

Let me not seem to have forgotten that a

generous soul in the hours of deepest contrition will load itself with responsibilities that are far beyond its own, and certainly it was not for me to take too literally all the burning words of self-reproach which Rossetti heaped upon himself. If I had now to reconstruct his life afresh from the impressions of that night, I think it would be a far more human, more touching, more affectionate, more unselfish, more intelligible figure that would emerge than the one hitherto known to the world.

It would be the figure of a man who, after engaging himself to one woman in all honour and good faith, had fallen in love with another, and then gone on to marry the first out of a mistaken sense of loyalty and a fear of giving pain instead of stopping, as he must have done if his will had been stronger and his heart sterner, at the door of the church itself. It would be the figure of a man who realised that the good woman he had married was reading his secret in spite of his efforts to conceal it, and thereby losing all joy and interest in life. It would be the figure of a man who, coming home late at night to find his wife dying, probably by her own hand, was overwhelmed with remorse, not perhaps for any unkindness, any want of attention, still less any act of infidelity

on his part, but for the far deeper wrong of failure of affection for the one being to whom affection was most due.

Thus the burial of his manuscript in her coffin was plainly saying: "This was how I loved you once, for these poems were written to and inspired by you; and if I have wronged you since by losing my love for you, the solitary text of them shall go with you to the grave." Thus the sadness and gloom of later days, after the poet had repented of his sacrifice and the poems had been recovered and published, were clearly showing that Rossetti felt he had won his place among the English poets only by forfeiting the tragic grace and wasting the poignant pathos of his first consuming renunciation. And thus, too, the solitude of his last years, with its sleepless nights and its delusions born of indulgence in the drug, was not the result of morbid brooding over the insults of adverse critics, but of a deep-seated, if wholly unnecessary, sense as of a curse resting on him and on his work, whereof the malignancy of criticism was only one of many manifestations.

In this reading of Rossetti's life there is no room at all for any of the gross accusations of ill-treatment or neglect which have been sup-

posed by some of his less friendly judges to have burdened his conscience with regard to his wife. There was not one word in his self-reproach which conveyed to my mind a sense of anything so mean as that, and nothing I knew of Rossetti's tenderness of character would have allowed me to believe for a moment that he could be guilty of conscious cruelty. But there was indeed something here that was deeper and more terrible, if more spiritual—one of those tragic entanglements from which there is no escape because fate itself has made them.

All I knew of Rossetti, all he had told me of himself, all he had revealed to me of the troubles of his soul, all that had seemed so mysterious in the conduct of his life and the moods of his mind, became clear and intelligible and even noble and deeply touching in the light of his secret, as I thought I saw it for the first time on that journey from Cumberland to London. It lifted him entirely out of the character of the wayward, weak, uncertain, neurotic person who could put up a blank wall about his existence because his wife had died by the accident of miscalculating a dose of laudanum; who could do a grave act and afterward repent of it and undo it; who could finally shut himself up as a hermit and encourage a hundred delu-

sions about the world because a rival poet had resented his success. Out of all this it raised him into the place of one of the great tragic figures of literature, one of the great lovers whose lives, as well as their works, speak to the depth of their love or the immensity of their remorse.

It has only been with a thrill of the heart and a trembling hand that I have written this, but I have written it, and now I shall let it go because I feel that, however it may at first distress the little group who are all that are left of Rossetti's friends, it is a true reading of the poet's soul, and one that ennobles his memory.

It was just daylight as we approached London, and when we arrived at Euston it was a rather cold and gloomy morning. Rossetti was much exhausted when we got into the omnibus that was waiting for us, and when we reached Cheyne Walk, where the blinds were still down in all the windows, his spirits were very low. I did my best to keep a good heart for his sake as well as my own, but well do I remember the pathos of his words as I helped him, now feebler than ever, into his house:

"Thank God! Home at last, and never shall I leave it again!"

CHAPTER VIII

BACK IN CHELSEA

VERY deep and natural was the concern of Rossetti's older friends on seeing how wretched and stricken he looked on his return to London. That going to the mountains instead of to the sea had been a grievous mistake was now apparent to all of them, but the whole extent of the injury sustained was perhaps not at first realised by any.

Attributing Rossetti's physical prostration chiefly to hypochondriasis, they did their best during the next few weeks to induce him to take a hopeful view of life. The cheerfulness of their company, after what I well know must have been the lugubrious character of my own, had for a little while a good effect on Rossetti's spirits, and I will not forbear to say that I, too, welcomed it as a breath of morning air after a long month's lingering in an atmosphere of gloom. The sense of responsibility which in the solitude of the mountains had weighed me down

was now divided with the friends who were Rossetti's friends before they were mine.

Foremost among these friends was William Rossetti, and looking back to his devotion to his brother's personal needs during the last months of the poet's life, and thinking of his constant absorption in efforts to sustain and promote the poet's fame since his death, I doubt if the whole history of literary friendships has any such story of brotherly love and admiration.

Then there was Frederic Shields, so different from Rossetti in personal character and temperament, and as far apart from him as the poles in spiritual outlook upon life and death, yet always so faithful to the man, so loyal to the artist, so ready to put aside his own interests at the call of the poet's needs.

And then, above all, perhaps, there was Watts (Watts-Dunton), whose affection for Rossetti and beneficial influence upon him was perhaps the most touching and beautiful thing I had ever witnessed. No light matter it must have been to lay aside one's own cherished life-work and ambitions to be Rossetti's friend and brother at a time like this, but through these dark days Watts was with him to comfort, to divert, to interest, and to inspire him—asking

meantime no better reward than the knowledge that a noble mind and nature were thereby relieved from gloom or lifted out of sorrow.

If the poet's spirits had been low while we were in Cumberland, they were all but insupportable during the first weeks after our return to Chelsea. No longer able to work at the easel, and full of apprehension about his failing sight, he first tormented himself with the fear of poverty. There might, indeed, have been some ground for uneasiness on this head if Rossetti had lived, for though he had long earned a large income as a painter, he had saved little or nothing, and knowing this, he sometimes made rather grotesque predictions of absolute want. Out of such moods of despondency he had to be rallied by his friends, each in his different way, and I recall with some amusement and a good deal of emotion certain wild efforts by Shields to banish his melancholia, as well as some quiet and touching assurances by his brother that if the worst came to the worst, he could always come to live with him.

But Rossetti's fear of poverty during the first sad weeks after our return to Chelsea was not so hard to contend with as his dread of death. I should say as I think of this period, that if there was no longer any passionate longing to

live, there was certainly, with a settled conviction that death was coming, a wild fear of dying. What it was exactly that was going on in his mind, what struggle for mastery between the will-to-live and the will-to-die, with the dread of both, I cannot say, but I would venture the opinion that he was shrinking not only from the thought of pain, but also from that sinking into everlasting night and nothingness which was all that, so far as I could see, death seemed to mean to him then.

Never was I conscious that religious faith relieved his fears, still less brightened with any kind of hope the prospect of that passing and parting which is rest and eternal life. On the other hand, I was often aware that everything was distressing that reminded him of death. Belief in God was always with him—that I can firmly say; but religion in the conventional sense appeared to irritate him, and even the ringing of the church bells on Sunday seemed at this time to give him pain.

Perhaps it was a sign of his fear of death that his mind seemed to be constantly brooding upon it. I remember that one day, opening a drawer of the bookcase, under the books he took out a long, thick tress of rich auburn hair, and showed it to me for a moment. What he

told me about it I cannot say, but indeed there was no need to tell me anything, for I thought I knew what it was and where it came from. That was one of those hushed moments of life in which silence is sacred, and I will not break it farther even now. Rossetti's downward road was marked by many sign-posts that pointed to the past.

In spite of all the tender offices of friends, his health declined day by day, and he began to be afflicted by a violent cough. I noticed that it troubled him most at night after the taking of the chloral, and that it shook his whole system so terribly as to leave him for a while entirely exhausted.

The crisis was pending, and almost sooner than any of us expected it came. One evening a friend of former years, Westland Marston, the dramatist, came with his son, Philip Bourke Marston, the blind poet, to spend a few hours with Rossetti. For a while he seemed much cheered by their company, but later on he gave certain signs of uneasiness which I had learned to know too well. Removing restlessly from seat to seat, he threw himself at last upon the sofa in that rather awkward attitude which I have previously described. Presently he called out to me, in great nervous agitation, that he

could not move his arm, and, upon attempting to rise, that he had lost power in his leg as well.

We were all startled, but knowing the force of Rossetti's imagination on his bodily capacity, I tried to rally him out of his fears.

"Nonsense, Rossetti, you're only fancying it," I remember to have said. But, raising him to his feet, we realised only too surely that, from whatever cause, he had lost the use of his limbs.

The servants were called, and with the utmost alarm we carried Rossetti to his bedroom, up the tortuous staircase at the back of the studio, and I remember the intense vividness of his intellect at the moment and his obvious sense of humiliation at his helplessness in our hands.

The blind poet remained in the studio while we were taking Rossetti to his room, and after this was done he and I hurried away in a cab to Savile Row to fetch the doctor. I recall that drive through the streets at night with the blind man, who had seen nothing of what had occurred, but was trembling and breathing fast. An hour after the attack the doctor was in the house.

It was found that Rossetti had undergone a

species of mild paralysis, called, I think, loss of co-ordinative power. The juncture was a critical one, and it was decided that the time had come at last when the chloral, which was the root of all the mischief, should be decisively, entirely, and instantly cut off.

It is not for me to give an account of what was done at this crisis. I only know that a young medical man was brought into the house as a resident doctor to watch the case during the absence of the physician-in-chief, and that morphia was at first injected as a substitute for the narcotic which the system had grown to demand.

I recall the many hours in which Rossetti was delirious while his body was passing through the terrible ordeal of conquering the craving for the former drug, and the three or four days succeeding in which the two forces seemed to fight like demons for possession of him. During this period his mind had a strange kind of moonlight clearness, with a plain sense of all that was going on, a vivid memory of the friends and incidents of the past, with a desire to write letters to people whom he had not seen for years, yet a total loss of executive faculty of every kind. But the pathetic phase passed, and within a week after the experiment had

been begun he awoke one morning, calm in body, clear in mind, and grateful in heart.

His delusions were all dead, his intermittent suspicions of friends were as much gone as if they had never been, and nothing was left but the real Rossetti—a simple, natural, affectionate, lovable soul.

And now let me say that while it must have been the most pitiful weakness, not to say the most mistaken tenderness on my part (after all that has been published on the subject), to attempt to conceal an infirmity of Rossetti's mind which has led to much misconception of his character, I feel myself justified in alluding to it, and even dwelling on some of its painful manifestations, for the sake of the opportunity of showing that, coming with the drug that blighted half his life, it disappeared when the evil had been removed.

Perhaps none may say with any certainty to what the use of the drug was due, or what was due to it, though I have already given my opinion that it came from a far deeper source than the mental disturbance set up by adverse criticism; but sure I am, that the sadder side of his life was ever under its shadow, and that he was a new man on the day when it was over.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST OF HOME

AS soon as Rossetti was himself again he began to see his friends and relatives—his mother and sister, his brother, now always about him, Shields, Madox Brown, and of course Watts, who was with him every day. Some report of the seizure must have appeared in the newspapers, for I recall inquiries from well-known people which I received and answered in Rossetti's name, among them being a letter from Sir Henry Taylor, and one from Turgenieff, who was, I think, in London, and proposed to call.

I thought it strange when I realised how strongly Rossetti's real nature possessed the power of attaching people to his person that few letters came from the famous men still living who had been his friends in earlier years; but the link with the past was not entirely broken, for Burne-Jones came one evening, with his delicate and spiritual face full of affectionate

solicitude, and when I took him into the bedroom he was received with a faint echo of the cheery "Hulloa!" which he must have remembered so well.

Rossetti must have looked sadly unlike his former self, although our hearts were now so cheerful about him, for when, after a long half hour, the great painter came down from the bedroom where I had left the two old friends together, he was visibly moved, and at first could scarcely speak. I remember that he and I dined in the studio in the midst of the easels, and that, turning to an unfinished picture on one of them, he said:

"They say Gabriel cannot draw, but look at that hand. There isn't anybody else in the world who can draw a hand like that."

Christmas day was now nigh, and Rossetti, still confined to his room, begged me to spend that day with him. "Otherwise," he said, "how sad a day it must be to me, for I cannot fairly ask any other."

I had been asked to dine at a more cheerful house, but reflecting that this was my first Christmas in London, and it might be Rossetti's last, I readily decided to do as he wished. We dined alone—he in his bed, I at the little table at the foot of it on which I had first seen the

wired lamp and the bottles of medicine. Later in the evening William Rossetti, with brotherly affection, left his children and guests at his own house, and ran down to spend an hour with the invalid. As the night went on we could hear from time to time the ringing of the bells of the neighbouring churches, and I noticed that Rossetti was not disturbed by them as he had been formerly.

He talked that night brightly, with more force and incisiveness, I thought, than he had displayed for months. There was the ring of sincerity in his tone as he said he had always had loyal and unselfish friends; and then he spoke of his brother, of Madox Brown, and, perhaps, particularly of Watts. He said a word or two of myself, and then spoke with emotion of his mother and sister, and of his sister who was dead, and how they were supported through their sore trials by religious hope and resignation. He asked if I, like Shields, was a believer, and seemed altogether in a softer and more spiritual mood than I could remember to have noticed before.

With such talk we passed the last of Rossetti's Christmas nights, and on many a night afterward I spent some hours with him in his

room. The drug being gone, he was in nearly every sense a changed man, and I remember particularly that there was no more fear of poverty and no painful brooding over death. That any hope such as could be called faith had taken the place of dread I cannot positively say, and perhaps if I had to give in a word a definition of Rossetti's attitude toward spiritual things, I should say that it was then that of an agnostic—not of an unbeliever, but of one who simply did not know. Before the mystery of the hereafter, of the unknown and the unknowable, he seemed to stand silent, perhaps content, certainly without any anxious questioning, any agonising doubts.

Those hours with Rossetti, when he had just emerged from the thraldom of so many years, are among the most treasured of my memories, and I recall the impression I had at the time that much of his conversation was like the stern lamp of a ship which casts its light on the path that is past. Thus one day he said: "To marry one woman, and then find out, when it is too late, that you love another, is the deepest tragedy that can enter into a man's life."

No more now than before did he interest himself in the affairs of the world outside his own

walls, and what he called "the momentary momentousness" of many political questions seemed never to stir his pulse for a moment; but there was one great social problem which always moved him to the depths. He had dealt with it in both his arts—as a poet in "Jenny," as a painter in "Found," and perhaps in "Mary Magdalene." It was the age-long problem of the poor scapegoats of society who carry the sins of men into a wilderness from which there is no escape. These pariahs, these outcasts, had a fascination for him always, but it was of a kind that could only be felt by a man who was essentially pure-minded.

"That is a world," he used to say, "that few understand, though there is hardly anybody who does not think that he knows something about it."

On Rossetti it seemed to sit like a nightmare. For the poor women themselves, who after one false step find themselves in a blind alley, in which the way back is forbidden to them, he had nothing but the greatness of his compassion. The pitiless cruelty of their position often affected him to tears. That they had transgressed against all the recognised rules of morality and social order, and were often wallowing in an abyss of degradation,

did not rob them of his pity. No human creature was common or unclean. "With our God is forgiveness," and feeling this, Rossetti also seemed to feel that behind the sin of these sinners there was always the immensity, even the majesty of their suffering.

All this he had put into "Jenny," with its tenderness to the little closed soul of the girl, and its passionate denunciation of the lust of man; he had put it into "Found," with the agony of shame in the face of the woman on her knees and the pathos of the net which confined the calf that was going to slaughter in the country cart; he had put it into "Mary Magdalene," too, in the light, as of an awakening soul, in the eyes of the courtesan when she hears the Master's call; but more touching, perhaps more immediately affecting than any of these great works (in my view the greatest the world has yet seen on this subject), was the talk of the man himself when, at this most spiritual hour of the period in which I knew him, he would speak of what he believed to be one of the poignant tragedies of human life.

I will not shrink from telling of one act of Rossetti's moral courage at that time, which I have never since been able to recall without

a thrill of the heart. Somewhere I had met with one of the women of the underworld who seemed to me to have kept her soul pure amid the mire and slime that surrounded her poor body. She was a girl of great beauty, some education, refinement, knowledge of languages, and not a little reading and good taste. Her position had been due to conditions more tragic than the ordinary ones, but she was held to it by the same relentless laws which bound the commonest of her class.

It was a very pitiful example of the tragedy which most deeply interested Rossetti, and when I told him about it he was much affected. But he did not attempt or suggest the idea of rescue. He knew the problem too well to imagine that anything less than complete reversal of the social order could help a girl like that to escape from the blind alley in which she walked alone. The only thing that could be done for her was to keep her soul alive amid all the dead souls about her, and this he tried to do.

Asking me to bring him a copy of his first volume of poems (the volume containing "Jenny"), he wrote the girl's name and his own, with a touching line or two, on the title-page, and told me to give her the book. I did

so, and I recall the astonishment and emotion of the poor outcast thing, who appreciated perfectly what it meant to the illustrious poet to send that present to a lost one like her. As far as I can remember, I never saw her again, nor heard what became of her, but well I know that wherever she is that book is with her still, and the tender grace of Rossetti's act has not been lost.

I have one more memory of those cheerful evenings in the poet's bedroom, with its thick curtains, its black oak chimney-piece and crucifix, and its muffled air (all looking and feeling so much brighter than before), and that is of Buchanan's retraction of all that he had said in his bitter onslaught of so many years before. One day there came a copy of the romance called "God and the Man," with its dedication, "To an Old Enemy." I do not remember how the book reached Rossetti's house, whether directly from the author or from the publisher, or, as I think probable, through Watts, who was now every day at Cheyne Walk, in his untiring devotion to his friend, but I have a clear memory of reading to the poet the beautiful lines, in which his critic so generously and so bravely took back everything he had said:

"I would have snatched a bay-leaf from thy brow,
Wronging the chaplet on an honoured head;
In peace and charity I bring thee now
A lily-flower instead.

"Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song,
Sweet as thy spirit, may this offering be;
Forget the bitter blame that did thee wrong,
And take the gift from me."

Rossetti was, for the moment, much affected by the pathos of the words, but, in the absence of his name, it was difficult at first to make him believe they were intended for him.

"But they are, I'm sure they are, and Watts says they are," I went on repeating, until he was compelled to believe.

It was a moving incident, and doubly affecting at that moment, when the poet had just emerged from the long night of so much suffering. And it was fit and meet that Buchanan's retraction should come before it was too late for Rossetti to hear of it, but if I had wanted anything to prove to me that the cloud that had hung over the poet's life was not that of another poet's criticism, but a far graver thing, I should have found it in the fact that after the first hour of hearing of the retraction, he never spoke of the matter again.

I have another memory of those evenings in

the bedroom, and it is to me a very touching one. After some little time, in which Rossetti seemed to regain strength, he got out of bed for a few hours every day, and then we realised that he was not recovering. The partly stricken limbs had gained power in some measure, but his weakness was obvious, and it was only too clear to everybody that the road for Rossetti was indeed all downhill now.

On the last day of the year, I remember, I found this certainty especially oppressive, from the acute sense one always has of coming trouble as one passes the solemn landmarks of time. I could not stay indoors that night, so I walked about the streets, but I had not counted on the fact that by staying out of the house to avoid painful emotions, I was only gathering them up to fall in a single blow the moment I came back.

It was about half an hour after midnight when I returned home, and then, as well as I can remember, Rossetti was alone. The church bells were still ringing their cheerful appeal as I stepped into his room, and after a feeble effort at the customary "Hulloa," we wished each other "A Happy New Year."

CHAPTER X

AT BIRCHINGTON

AFTER a few weeks upstairs Rossetti was able to get down to his studio, but his strength did not increase, so it was decided that the error of the autumn should, if possible, be repaired by sending him, late as it was, to the seaside. At that moment a friend of earlier days, Seddon, the architect, offered the use of a bungalow at Birchington, a few miles from Margate, and I was asked to go down and look at the place. I did so, and, coming back, I reported so favourably of the house and the situation that Rossetti determined to move immediately.

There were the same laborious preparations as before, only they were lightened now by Rossetti's calmer spirits, and toward the end of January the poet left his home for the last time. Whether he had any premonitions that this was the fact I cannot say, but, whatever the hopes of his recovery cherished by his

friends, it was clear enough to me that the poet himself had no illusions. And, though he gave no outward sign of regret, I will not doubt that the day was a sad one on which he turned his back on the house in which he had known so much joy and sorrow, the place so full of himself, written all over with the story of his life, the studio, the muffled bedroom, the closed-up drawing-room, the little green dining room, and the garden, now ploughed up and lost.

We travelled in ordinary carriages now, taking with us the domestic servants from Cheyne Walk, a professional nurse, and my sister, then a little girl. Though so weak, Rossetti was in good spirits, and I remember that on getting into the compartment he tried to amuse the child by pretending that the carriage itself had been built expressly in her and his honour.

"Look here," he said, pointing to the initials on the carpet ("London, Chatham, and Dover Railway," as it was then), "they have even written our names on the floor—L. C. and D. R.—Lily Caine and Dante Rossetti."

It had been a fine and cheerful day when I went down to Thanet to "report on the land," but it was a dark and sullen one when I arrived there with Rossetti. Birchington was not a holiday resort in those days, though it was be-

ing laid out for its career in that character. It was merely an old-fashioned Kentish settlement on the edge of a hungry coast.

The village, which stood back from the shore the better part of a mile, consisted of a quaint old Gothic church, gray and green, a winding street, a few shops, and a windmill, while the bungalow we were to live in stood alone on the bare fields to the seaward side, and looked like a scout that had ventured far toward the edge of unseen cliffs. The land around was flat and featureless, unbroken by a tree or bush, and one felt as if the great sea in front, rising up to the horizon in a vast round hill, dominated and threatened to submerge it. The clouds were low, the sea was loud, the weather was chill, and if Rossetti had been able to act on his first impression of Birchington, I think he would have gone back to London immediately.

But next day the sun shone, the air was bright, the skylarks were singing, and Rossetti was more content. Our little house was homely, too, in its simple way, a wooden building of one story, with a corridor going down the middle, and bedrooms opening to front and back. Rossetti chose a back bedroom, that he might hear as little as possible of the noise of the sea.

There was a large dining room at the end of the corridor, and there we set up Rossetti's easels, laid out my usual truckload of books, and otherwise prepared for a lengthy sojourn. Somebody lent us a huge telescope, and we put that up also, though there was little to look at along the bleak coast except the bare headland of Reculvers, and nothing on the empty sea except an occasional sailing ship going up to the Baltic, for the great steamers hardly ever came so near.

During the first weeks of our stay in Birchington, Rossetti was able to take short walks with me every morning (he rose earlier now) along the tops of the chalk cliffs overlooking the rugged shore, and round the road that winds about the church and churchyard. It is not without a trembling of the heart that I now remember how often we walked round that churchyard, as long as Rossetti was able to walk at all. But, though he would heavily lean on a stick with one hand, and as heavily on my arm with the other, the exercise soon proved to be too much for him, for he was growing weaker day by day.

Nevertheless his spirits kept up wonderfully, and besides painting a little at intervals, he took to poetical compositions afresh, and

wrote (of all things in the world for that moment) a facetious ballad, called "Jan Van Hunks," telling an eccentric story of a Dutchman's wager to smoke against the devil. Rossetti himself had never smoked in his life, I think, but his enjoyment of the Dutchman's agony, as he recited or dictated to me in the drawing-room the stanzas he had composed in bed, made the place ring with laughter.

We had our serious and even thrilling moments, too, in that house on the edge of the coast, as when the wind roared around the little place at night, and the light of Reculvers was all that we could see through the blackness of rolling rain clouds, and we knew that long stretches of the chalk cliffs in front were churning down into the champing sea.

I remember that once in the morning, after a storm, when the sea was calm and the sun was shining, we saw that a foreign ship, which had come to anchor a mile or so outside, had taken fire, and we heard a little later that the crew, on taking flight from her, had left behind them the body of a comrade who had died during the night. The incident took hold of Rossetti's imagination. All through the day he watched the burning ship, and at night, when hull and rigging were aflame, and noth-

ing was to be seen but that blazing mass in a circle of glittering light, the sense as of a funeral pyre was so strong on both of us that we sat for hours in the darkness to look at it.

Weak as he was in body, his intellect was as powerful as in his best days, and he was just as eager to occupy himself with my own doings and tryings-to-do. Thus in the evenings he would make me read aloud the articles I was writing for the literary journals, and tell him my first vague schemes for the stories that were on the forehead of the time to come.

I think he liked my tendency to take the simple incidents out of the Bible as foundations for modern novels, not because he had any Puritan leanings whatsoever, but because he recognised the elemental strength of the primitive themes. It was then that I was shaping the tales that I have since written on the lines of the lives of Jacob and Esau, of Samuel and Eli, and of the Prodigal Son, and it is impossible for me to say how much these stories may owe (of whatever may be good in them) to the sure criticism of his searching mind. One thing I know and may be permitted to say, that when I wrote that section of one of my novels which describes a man who is cut off from his kind and is alone with his own soul, I was

drawing deeply of the well of Rossetti's mind, as it revealed itself to me.

He may have been half-way to the other world, but he was still not incapable of a level-headed view of any attempt to get there before one's time, and he made more than a single protest against certain spiritualistic tendencies of mine, which were born, perhaps, of the reading of Swedenborg. I particularly recall the vehemence of his objection to my going to a *séance* to which one of his own earlier friends had invited me, and that the reason he gave was like a speech out of "Hamlet," or a passage from Sir Thomas Browne.

"You must not go," he said decisively.

"Why not, Rossetti? Do you think it's all a fraud, and the spirits do not appear?"

"No, but they're evil spirits—devils—and they're allowed to torment and deceive people."

But even during these first weeks at Birchington, Rossetti was not entirely dependent upon me for society and solace. He was visited at intervals by nearly all the friends of his later years, as well as by some of lifelong standing. His spirits would rally perceptibly on the sight of these friends, and then fall as sensibly when they were gone, but when I remember the lighter moments of these rather

heavy days I cannot forget the visit of one other acquaintance whom I need not name.

This was the person who carried out the work of the exhumation of his poems—the companion of earlier days, more reckless and tumultuous days, perhaps, as well as days of blank darkness. I had often heard him spoken of as a daring and adventurous creature, whose humorous audacity had overcome nearly all fear of his unscrupulousness.

Beginning life as the secretary, I think, of Ruskin, he had ultimately lived on his wits, doing anything and everything for a living, ingratiating himself into the graces and worming himself into the confidence of nearly all the painters of Rossetti's immediate circle, and making Rossetti, in particular, his conscious victim.

One day this soldier of fortune turned up unexpectedly at our bungalow, and was received with the utmost cordiality. He was a somewhat battered person, with the face of a whipped cab horse, but so clever, so humorous, so audacious, that Rossetti's flagging spirits were wonderfully awakened by his visit. I think the poet remarked that the last time they had met was when his visitor had bought "a tidy bit of blue" (blue china) for him.

"And what are you doing now, Charlie?" said Rossetti.

"Buying horses for the King of Portugal," said the soldier of fortune, and then Rossetti laughed until he nearly rolled out of his seat.

Our visitor stayed all day, telling stories, veracious and apocryphal, of nearly everybody known to us in the world, and mentioning to me, in a sort of parenthetical aside, that when he was a young man he had written nearly all Ruskin's early books, which was probably true enough, since he had almost certainly copied them from the author's manuscript in those better days, when his fingers had done the work which was now being discharged by his nimbler wits.

Feeble as Rossetti was at the time, the visit of this unaccountable being did him good, and he laughed all evening after the man had gone, talking of his adventures of various kinds, as well as telling his familiar stories over again. One of the latter, which particularly amused him, was of a man near to death, to whom the clergyman came and said, "Dear friend, do you know who died to save you?" "Oh, Meenister, Meenister," said the dying man, "is this a time for conundrums?"

All this, however, was but the flickering of

the lamp that was slowly dying out, and it was only too obvious that Rossetti's strength was becoming less and less. His eyesight was feebler, and having already given up his attempts to paint, he had now given up his efforts to read. With difficulty he rose for a few hours every day, and only with the help of the nurse's arm or mine was he able to reach the drawing-room. Seeing how things stood with him, I suggested that he should let me send for his mother and sister, and he consented, saying:

"Then you really think I am dying? At *last* you think so!"

CHAPTER XI

"WHATEVER THERE IS TO KNOW"

ROSSETTI'S mother and sister came without more than a day or two's delay. The mother, a little, sweet woman, with a soft face and a kind of pure morning air always about her, very proud to be the mother of a son whose name was ringing through the world, very sad to see him so surely going before her. The sister, Christina, a woman of great intellectuality, but without a trace of the pride of intellect, a famous poet herself, yet holding her reputation as nothing compared with that of her brother, whose genius, she plainly thought, was to carry on the family name.

To relieve the long hours of the evenings, I borrowed a great batch of novels from a lending library at Margate, and Christina read them aloud in the drawing-room. She was a fine reader, not emotional, perhaps, and certainly not humorous, but always vigorous of

voice and full of intellectual life. Rossetti was interested in nearly everything that was read to him, and though some of it was poor stuff, some of it, like "Henry Dunbar," was good, and a little of it, like "The Tale of Two Cities," was great. I remember that he was deeply touched by Sidney Carton's sacrifice, and said he would have liked to paint the last scene of it.

Thus February slid into March, and spring began to come, with its soft sunshine and the skylarks singing in the morning, but Rossetti's health did not improve. The hours in the drawing-room became shorter every day, and we all knew that the end was drawing on. At the request, I think, of the London physician, we called in a local doctor, a country practitioner of more than average intelligence, who knew nothing, however, of his patient, and asked him some awkward and rather gawkish questions. I remember that one morning I met the good man coming out of the house with a look of confusion on his face, and that he drew me aside and whispered, by way of warning, his secret opinion of the state of Rossetti's mind.

"Your friend does not *want* to live," he said. "If I were to leave a glass of some-

thing on the table by his bed, and say, 'Drink that, and you'll be gone in five minutes,' it would be done before I could get out of the room."

I thought then the doctor was wrong, and I still think so. True that by this time the longing for life was gone, and gone, too, was "the muddy imperfection" of fear of death, but I cannot believe that by any act of his own he would have hastened his end. He was in no pain, he had reconciled himself to the thought that his active life was over, and he was clearly biding his time.

The local clergyman came, too, at Christina's suggestion, I think, and Rossetti saw him quite submissively. He was a fairly capable man, I remember, and when he talked in the customary way of such good souls Rossetti listened without resistance, having no theological subtleties to baffle him with; but after a while the deep, slow, weary eyes of the poet, looking steadfastly at him, seemed to silence the clergyman, and he got up and went away.

Rossetti's attitude toward the other life seemed to be the same then as his attitude toward this life—the attitude of one who is waiting.

Still we say as we go—
"Strange to think by the way,
Whatever there is to know,
That shall we know one day."

One day, more than usually cheerful with signs of the coming spring, the local doctor made the painful and somewhat belated discovery that Rossetti was in an advanced stage of Bright's disease, and we telegraphed to his brother, to Watts, and to Shields to come down immediately. That night his dear old mother and I remained with him until early morning, and then his sister took our place by his side.

Since the coming of his mother and sister, I had seen less of Rossetti than before, feeling a certain delicacy in intruding upon the sacred intimacies of the home circle in these last reunions, but the next morning, after he had received what we believed to be his death warrant, I spent a long hour with him.

"Hulloa! Sit down! I thought at one time you were going to leave me," he said, as I went into his room.

"You'll have to leave me first, Rossetti," I replied.

"Ah!"

And then I knew what I had said.

I found his utterance thick and his speech

from that cause hardly intelligible, but in spite of that he talked long and earnestly.

He spoke of his love of early English ballad literature, and how he had said to himself, when he first met with it, "There lies your line," and then, in a simple, natural way, but with a certain quiet exultation, reminding me of Keats's calm confidence, he spoke of holding his place among the English poets after his death. After that he half sang, half recited snatches from one of Iago's songs in "Othello."

"Strange thing to come into one's head at such a moment," he said. I had never seen him more bright.

It was my last interview with Rossetti alone of the many I had had of many kinds, and I will not shrink from telling the story of the end of it, so deeply does it touch me as often as it comes back to my mind. There had been a friend of his earlier years whom we of his later life could not but consider an evil influence, and this friend we finally expelled. It was all done with Rossetti's consent, but clearly as he saw that he had suffered from that friendship, he never ceased to regret it, and now, at the last moment, after months of silence, he said in a whisper:

"Have you heard anything of ——?"

"Nothing at all."

"Would you tell me if you had?"

"If you asked me—yes."

"My poor ——," he murmured, and, unable to say more, I went out of the room, feeling how poor and small had been our proud loyalty compared with the silent pathos of his steadfast friendship.

Next day (it was Good Friday) the friends we had sent for arrived—his brother, Watts-Dunton, and Shields. Weak as he was he was much cheered by their company, but well we knew that he was always aware that the gathering of his friends about him meant that the wings of death seemed to us to be gathering, too.

He made his will the day following, leaving everything to his own, with the provision that three or four of us who had been closest to him during his last years should each choose something out of his house to remember him by. Watts-Dunton drew up the document, I made a fair copy of it, and after Rossetti had signed it with his trembling hand, it was witnessed by me and by another. Only at that moment did the placid temper of these last days seem disturbed. Money had never been an object in Rossetti's life, and these material provisions

seemed to vex him a little now, as though they came too late, and were dragging his spirit back.

In view of the local doctor's alarming report, the London physician was telegraphed for, and he arrived on Saturday evening. His visit gave great heart to everybody. While recognising the serious condition, he was not without hope. After examining his patient, he took us all into another room and explained the position. It was true that Rossetti was now suffering from Bright's disease, induced, perhaps, by the prolonged use of the pernicious drug; but it did not follow that he must die immediately. With care of diet and general watchfulness over the conditions of health he must still live long. People with that ailment often lived five years, sometimes ten years, even fifteen.

He administered a kind of hot pack, and when we saw him off on Saturday night, we were all in great spirits. Next morning Rossetti was perceptibly better, and I think everybody in the house looked in upon him in his room and found him able to listen, and sometimes to talk. It was a beautiful Easter morning, and when the bells rang a joyful Easter peal I think both mother and sister went to

church. All was well during the day, and in the evening the nurse gave such a cheery report of the poet's condition that we were very happy. She was about to administer another pack, so we went off to other rooms, the mother and Christina to their bedroom, facing Rossetti's, William to the drawing-room, Watts-Dunton and Shields and I to the dining room down the corridor.

About nine o'clock Watts-Dunton left us for a short time, and when he returned he said he had been in Rossetti's room and found him at ease and very bright. Then we three gave way to good spirits, and began to laugh at little things, as is the way with people when a long strain seems to be relaxed. But immediately afterward we heard a terrible cry, followed by the sound of somebody scurrying down the corridor, and rapping loudly at every door.

It was all over before we seemed to draw breath. I remember the look of stupefaction in our faces, the sense of being stunned, as we three—Watts-Dunton, Shields, and I, leaving the two good women murmuring their prayers in the death chamber—returned to the dining room and said to each other, "Gabriel has gone!"

CHAPTER XII

"THAT SHALL WE KNOW ONE DAY"

WE found it hard to realise that Rossetti was dead, the dreadful fact having fallen at last with such fearful suddenness. Each of us no doubt had had his vision of how it was to be with Rossetti at the last. In mine he was to die slowly, body and mind sinking gradually to rest, as the lamp dies down, or as the boat, coming out of a tempestuous sea, lets drop its sail and glides into harbour. This was to be Nature's recompense for Rossetti's troubled days and sleepless nights, for his fierce joys and stormy sorrows. But Nature knew better the mysteries of the future, and Rossetti was to be the same tragic figure to the end, in sunshine and shadow, in life and death, always tragic.

The little household was still staggering under its sudden blow, when William Rossetti's wife arrived unexpectedly, and then, in the regathering of the company, all our hearts went

out to the old mother. The tides of memory must have been flowing back upon her as upon nobody else—back from the days of Rossetti's childhood, of his father's house and his father's death, to the hour when he, too, was dead, and she was left in the world without him. It was impossible to attempt to console the sweet old lady without feeling that we were holding out our hands to her in the dark.

Next morning I plucked some of the big pansies and wild violets that come early in the spring in that fresh sea air, and loving hands laid them on the poet's breast. His face, as he lay dead, was perfectly placid, the convulsive expression gone, and even the tired look that had clung to him in sleep as the legacy of the troubled years quite smoothed away. Shields spent the morning in making a pencil sketch of him, finding it a painful task, and weeping most of the time. Later in the day a plaster cast was taken of his head and his small, delicate hand.

The London newspapers were full of obituary articles, and the drowsy little seaside settlement appeared to awake to some vague consciousness of who it was that had been living in their midst. Nevertheless, I recall the look of blank bewilderment in the face of the

local clergyman who, having come in all gracious neighborliness to ask where the family wished Rossetti to be buried, meaning in what portion of the churchyard, received William Rossetti's reply in words like these:

"If my brother had his due, he would be buried in Westminster Abbey."

I wondered why it seemed to occur to nobody that Rossetti should be buried at Highgate with his wife, around whose life (and death) his own life had so plainly revolved, but William decided to bury his brother at Birchington, and no doubt William knew best.

I went up to London on some necessary business between the death and the burial, and the gaunt old house at Chelsea, which had always seemed a desolate place to me, for all the wealth of beautiful things, felt more than ever so now that the man who had been the soul of it lay dead in the little bungalow by the sea. I remember the emotion with which I stepped noiselessly into the studio, where there was no longer the cheery voice to greet me, and the sense of chill with which I passed the dark bedroom, now empty, on my way to bed.

I took back from London the feeling that by the death of Rossetti the world had become aware of the loss of a man of twofold genius,

but that its imagination had been most moved by learning of the two or three tragic facts in his storm-beaten life.

The funeral was a private one, and a few of Rossetti's friends came down to it. They were chiefly the friends of his later life, hardly any of the friends of earlier days being there. We heard that Burne-Jones had made effort to come, and had got as far as the railway station, where he became ill and turned back. Madox Brown was unwell in Manchester, and Ruskin was now an old man in Coniston, and as for the rest, perhaps the time and place of the funeral had not been communicated to them, or perhaps they thought the gradual asundering of the years had left them no right to be there.

It was a dumb sort of day, without wind, and the sky lying low on the sea. When I got into the last of the carriages there were some drops of rain, but they stopped before we reached the church. We were only a little company who stood about the grave, and all I can remember about that group is the figure of the blind poet, Marston, with tears in his sightless eyes. The grave was close to the church porch, and only a few yards away was the winding .path where Rossetti and I had so

often walked around the place which was now to be the place of his rest.

The friends left us that night, and after a day or two more the family went away. I was ill in bed by this time, and from some other cause Watts-Dunton also remained a little longer. I thought we two had been drawn closer to each other by a common affection and the loss of him by whom we had been brought together.

When I was better, and the time had come for us to go away, too, we walked one morning to the churchyard and found Gabriel's grave strewn with flowers. It was a quiet spring day, the birds were singing and the yellow flowers were beginning to show. As we stood by the grave under the shadow of the quaint old church, with the broad sweep of landscape in front, so flat and featureless that the great sea appeared to lie on it, and with the sleepy rumble of the rolling waters borne to us from the shore, we could not but feel that, little as we had thought to leave Rossetti there, no other place could be quite so fit.

It was, indeed, the resting place for a poet. In that bed, of all others, he must, at length, after weary years of sleeplessness, sleep the only sleep that was deep and would endure.

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

I BECOME A JOURNALIST

THE part that chance plays in human life needs no illustration from my personal experience, but when I remember how unimportant and how remote was the incident which led to my short career as a journalist, and thus to the calling which I have followed during the past five-and-twenty years, I cannot wonder that the blind force we call circumstance, whether working for good or for bad, is often known by a more religious name.

Among the few members of the devoted circle which had surrounded Rossetti was William Bell Scott, a poet and painter, who had never achieved the fame which I thought was his due. To right this wrong, it occurred to me one day, while we were at Birchington, to publish an article in his honour, and, for reasons I cannot recall, I sent it, uninvited, to the Liverpool *Mercury*. The article was published in due course, and it led to two very

contrary results, the first being that I lost forever the friendship of Scott, who became for the remainder of his life my bitter enemy; and the second, that I received a letter from John Lovell, the then editor of the *Mercury*, saying, as far as I can remember, "I have for some time thought of asking you to join our staff as an outside contributor, and I should be glad to know how you would like some such arrangement as that we should pay you, say £100 a year, and that you should write for us as much or as little as you please."

It was certainly an extraordinary proposal; but I think in the sequel it proved both the generosity and the practical wisdom of the man who made it. After the first six months of our informal relation, I received a second letter from the editor, saying:

"The proprietors of the *Mercury* had not anticipated that you would do so much work, and therefore they desire to increase the honorarium to £150."

Rather later, a letter of similar purport came to me, and I need not further deal with this side of my connection with the paper than to say that, on its financial side, it speedily became everything that a young journalist could expect.

Shortly after Rossetti's death, I took two rooms (I called them "chambers") in the old, now demolished Clement's Inn, and there devoted myself to my work as a journalist, which consisted chiefly of my work on the *Mercury*. If it were necessary to dwell on my domestic life, I could, perhaps, tell curious stories of my days in chambers, for, with my income of a hundred a year, I had to be my own cook and housemaid, making my own bed and breakfast, as well as my own politician and prophet, regulating for the people of Liverpool some of the affairs of state, and discussing for the world in general the laws of the universe; but it may be enough to say that I was rather poor and very lonely, having few friends in London, hardly any houses to call at, and little to live for except my family, who were far away, and my work, which was always with me. But these were, perhaps, not the worst conditions for a young provincial journalist, who, with a fixed income, however small, was allowed the liberty of a free lance. I was to do whatever I liked, and I did many things in those lonely days which helped me, I think, in later years, to some knowledge of life and to a genuine love of humanity.

This was the period when newspapers in

London were for the first time becoming aware that there was "news" in a new book; and I did my best to put the *Mercury* on an equality with the London dailies, by giving a review of an important work on the day of its publication, and that led, by one means after another, to certain literary friendships, which have become interesting and valuable to me all my life. Thus at the table of my distinguished friend Watts-Dunton I frequently met Mr. Swinburne; under the wing of Lord Houghton I met Lord Coleridge, and at the house of Coleridge I met Matthew Arnold and Robert Browning.

I think these associations helped to stimulate my ambition and to elevate my ideals, if not to promote my material welfare; and whatever the advantage I derived from them, I owe it, in part or altogether, to my early connection with journalism. For the rest, I can scarcely say if the reading and reviewing of so many modern books was good or bad for me as a novelist; and I sometimes remember with a flush and a shudder that with even more than the usual daring born of youth and inexperience, I played in my turn the extraordinary part of law-giver and judge in literature while I was still a learner and tyro. But this topsy-

turveydom is apparently a necessary condition of nearly all literary criticism.

The roving commission which Lovell had given me took me to the theatre on first nights, and I suppose I telegraphed to Liverpool a hundred notices of new plays produced in London. In this relation I recall two incidents, equally pleasing and equally fruitful, the first being a letter addressed to my editor by Edward Russell (the best, I think, of all living dramatic critics), saying enthusiastic things of the *Mercury* dramatic articles; and the second being a letter from Wilson Barrett, protesting against one of them, and desiring me to call upon him and explain. The precise ground of Barrett's objection I cannot now remember, but I recall the closing passages of his frank attack, which was something like this: "And now that I've told you what I think of your article, I wish to tell you what I think of yourself. I think you could write a play, and if some day you should hit on a subject suitable for me, I shall be glad if you will let me hear of it."

The theatre was not the only scene in which, under the wing of the *Mercury*, I studied drama. My editor discovered that at the moment of the unexpected death of a celebrity

he was sometimes hard pressed for an adequate obituary notice, and therefore he resolved to have a good body of such articles prepared and pigeon-holed in advance of the times when they would be required. In this work of preparation my services were engaged, and I wrote numberless obituary notices of people still living, including nearly all the literary friends with whom I used to dine and smoke.

I called these my post-mortem examinations, and, making no secret of them, I sometimes engaged the co-operation of my subjects themselves in preparing the substance of what was to be said about them after their deaths. During the twenty to thirty odd years which have intervened, the greater part of my post-mortem examinations have been published; and I trust the readers of the *Mercury* have at least not been wounded by such ill-timed censure of people newly dead as too often, nowadays, under the feeble pretence of impartiality and of holding the scales of justice, disfigures, and, I think, disgraces the columns of some leading papers in London.

My post-mortem labours led me to the British Museum, for the collecting of my material; and there, during some six or nine months, I stud-

ied, by the way, one of the most curious and pathetic aspects of London life. The reading-room of the great library was in those days an extraordinary scene to one who had eyes to see and ears to hear. Its regular frequenters were a strange conglomeration of people of all nationalities, all interests, and nearly all classes; but the dominant class was the dreaming class, the Don Quixotes of the human family, creating a world of their own —a world of vision which was tragically out of harmony with the world of reality in which they lived.

The man in the shabby coat and greasy hat, who had been working for ten years on the treatise that was to make him immortal; the exile from Germany or Italy, who had spent half a lifetime in liberating his country, and lived, meantime, in a bare back room in Soho; the fanatics, the cranks, the visionaries—all these were there, and I came to know many of them, and to feel a compassion for their mental and material condition that was sometimes intensely painful. I have often wondered that nobody has used for the purposes of a novel a scene of life so full of varied and pathetic interest as the reading-room of the British Museum.

But, outside my literary and dramatic exercises, there was one wide sphere of literary activity in which I loved to live. My lonely life in London left me to find my few amusements for myself, and I found them principally in the streets. I was living in the heart of the great city, and, though the gardens of the old Clement's Inn gave me an almost cloisteral quiet in my rooms, I was on the edge of one of the poorest quarters in London, the now denuded Clare Market, wherein Richard Savage and Samuel Johnson walked through the long nights of their poverty, when, homeless and without food, they resolved, in their patriotic ardour, that, come what would, they "could never desert their country."

Genius might not make its home there in my days, but humanity did so; and I found a world that was valuable to study in the poor people who lived in the wretched rookeries (or say ratteries) which the County Council have since pulled down. The "Old Frenchman," with his Jovian bare head, who sold evening papers in the Strand; the old hatter and the old second-hand bookseller in Clement's Passage; the poor chorus girls from the neighbouring theatres, who were treated worse than dogs by creatures worse than men; the poor little Italian organ

boys, who were bought and sold like slaves; and then the frequenters of the bogus clubs, of the dancing academies, of the gambling hells—all these were my neighbours, a few of them were my friends, and most of them found their way in some sort of disguise into the columns of my paper.

It was not a bad apprenticeship for a novelist to live amid associates and scenes like these; but I think I can say with truth that what I prize most, as the result of the experience of those days, is the tenderness it left for the poor and the oppressed, especially the oppressed among women and girls, whose suffering utters a cry which even yet threatens to drown for me all the other sounds of life.

When I was in Iceland four years ago, I was interested to hear from a young poet that Parliament had granted him a stipend to travel abroad and develop his talent. Something like that was what the *Mercury* did for me when it gave me for several years at least a living wage on condition that I reported myself every day. It afforded me a magnificent apprenticeship to the profession of novelist, and it is my own fault if adequate results have not ensued. It sent me to the University of Life, the University of the London streets, the London po-

lice courts, the London drinking, dancing, and gaming halls and general underground resorts; and I should have had to be a poor apprentice, indeed, to come through its curriculum without some knowledge of the world.

I am now fifty-five years of age, and have had thirty years' experience of the literary life, and if a beginner were to ask me what school I consider best for the novelist, I should answer, without hesitation, the school of journalism.

The imaginative writer needs invention and sympathy, and these are the gifts of Nature; but, whatever the deftness of the workman's hand, he cannot "make bricks without straw," and the life of one man is hardly ever so full of incident as to find material for many books. But the school of journalism is constantly crowding the brain of the student with the incidents of countless lives; and, speaking for myself, I know that in those hours of mingled agony and delight, in which the scheme of a novel is being composed, there come swarming in upon me at every turn of the plot the recollections of my days as a journalist—recollections of this face, or of that voice, of the pathetic figure of the blind mother who had never seen her babe, or of the wistful eyes of

the condemned man when he looked at me as he mounted the scaffold. But journalism, to be the best school for the novelist, must be the journalism of the police court, the divorce court, the hospital, and the jail, where human nature is real and stark, if vulgar and low—not the journalism of "society," where humanity is trying its poor best to wear a mask.

CHAPTER II

JOHN RUSKIN

I HAVE spoken of the friends whom my earliest efforts at authorship had won for me, and one of the first of these was Ruskin. My friendship with Ruskin was not intimate, but it was of long standing, and it revealed to me his mind and character at important periods of his life. The first point of touch I had with him was when he was founding his Guild of St. George, and writing in vehement denunciation of the spirit of the age. It was then the fashion for writers in newspapers to deride his view of political economy as something too puerile for serious treatment, and perhaps it was the sincerity and enthusiasm of the championship in the salad days of my journalism, though I was hardly more than a schoolboy, and my organ was a little weekly in the Isle of Man, which engaged his interest and sympathy. I remember his tenderness, his appreciativeness, his gratitude for the

feeblest help, the ardour of his own intellectual passion, and his power of firing enthusiasm. The years which have intervened have seen the triumph of many of his theories, once so flippantly derided, and it pleased him well that I should say so when I visited at Coniston a little while before his death.

My next point of touch with Ruskin was through Rossetti. It was not usual for the members of Rossetti's circle to speak of Ruskin with enthusiasm. His social aims they did not sympathise with or even care about, and they were often impatient of his artistic criticism. There were exceptions to the rule of this unfavourable attitude, and I cannot recall any hostility on the part of Rossetti himself. Indeed, Rossetti's personal liking for Ruskin seems strange to me now when I remember how little their characters had in common, and among the many stories of the one told to me by the other, I recall a tale which illustrates this liking and this difference clearly.

During the earlier years of their friendship Ruskin had a secretary who was a never-ending source of amusement to Rossetti, and of embarrassment and vexation to Ruskin himself. This was the soldier of fortune who visited Rossetti in the last days of his life at

Birchington, and he was the most impudent rogue it was possible to imagine. He had the marks of the humorous rascal written all over his face, and I remember that he informed me that he had written most of Ruskin's earlier works. One day he told Ruskin that a certain friend of theirs, a painter, was in despair for the want of a large sum—I think a thousand pounds. Ruskin promptly sat down and wrote a check for the amount, and gave it to his secretary.

Time passed, Ruskin heard nothing more of the money, almost forgot all about it, and he and his secretary parted. But, calling one day on his friend, he found him tramping the studio in a state of semi-delirium.

"What's amiss?" said Ruskin.

"Why, that scoundrel and thief, ——, has been getting money in my name, saying I sent him to borrow it."

Ruskin dropped his head, but said nothing. The painter's suspicions were aroused.

"Has he ever borrowed from you?"

"Perhaps—I'm not sure—I forget," said Ruskin, looking embarrassed and ashamed.

This was Rossetti's story, as nearly as I can remember it, but what is freshest in my memory is the roar of Rossetti's laughter at the

audacity of the rascal's theft. That was the Italian in Rossetti, and, like a true son of Italy, he continued, as I have shown, to tolerate the man down to the last days of his life, knowing his character, but enjoying his humour. Years afterward I mentioned the humorous dog in Ruskin's presence, and, though nothing particular was said, I could not mistake the meaning of the heightened colour which crossed the author's face. Ruskin's outlook on life was purely ethical.

During the last year but one before Ruskin's death, I had the pleasure to meet him at his house at Coniston. Although I had known more than a little of him for so long, and had enjoyed so many points of touch with him, it was the first time I had met him face to face. He had then been for years silent, and, so far as active interest in the affairs of life goes, he had long been dead. I found him very old and bent and feeble, a smaller, frailer man than I looked for; well in health both of body and mind, but with faculties that were dying down very slowly and gently and almost imperceptibly, as the lamp dies down when the oil fails in it.

His head was not so large as I expected to find it, or it hardly seemed to me in form or

size either grand or massive; his eyes were slow and peaceful, having lost their former fire; and his face, from which the quiet life of later years had smoothed away the lines of strong thought and torturing experience, was too much hidden by a full gray beard. He spoke very little, and always in a soft and gentle voice, that might have been the voice of a woman, but he listened to everybody, and smiled frequently. All the fiery heat of earlier days was gone, all the nervous force of the fever patient, all the capacity for noble anger and religious wrath. Nothing was left but gentleness, sweetness, and quiet courtesy, the unruffled peace of a breathless evening that is sliding into a silent night. In short, his whole personality left the impression of the approach of death, but of death so slow, so gradual, so tender, and so beautiful that it almost made one in love with it to see it robbed of every terror.

I think he was glad to see me, for the sake of what I could tell him of certain friends of his early manhood, from whom the world had long divided him, and perhaps because, as he said, I resembled one of them as he had known him thirty years before. So he sat up until nearly eleven o'clock on the two nights of my

visit, and in default of his own talking, which I should dearly have loved to listen to, if the days had not gone by for that eloquent tongue to speak clearly, I talked of some of the men and things he loved to hear about.

I found that his strongest remaining interest was not in art, but in social problems, and it pleased him better to know that his social teaching was finding followers than that his art views were being discussed. It amused him, also, that I could tell something about some earlier occupants of his beautiful home, when it was a kind of head centre for the production of the literature of political revolt, with which Mazzini and others ran the blockade of the censorship of Italy. Probably he knew more of this than I did, although my story came from the printer of the revolutionary pamphlets, but perhaps he was less familiar with the incidents of a sort of Jane Eyre story, whereof a well-known authoress was the leading actor, and Brantwood the central scene.

It was winter time, and Coniston Old Man was heavily capped with snow, yet once a day Ruskin took a walk in the road, going slowly with a stick, and leaning on the arm of his man-servant. Behind his house there is a rocky

hillside, with winding steps to the summit, and in former days he climbed the path constantly, but that was an impossible exercise now. Apparently he passed most of his time in a little parlour overlooking the lake, taking his meals there instead of with the family, and only coming into the drawing-room after dinner. The little sitting room contained some priceless treasures, chief among them being bound copies of certain of Scott's manuscripts, and mention of these documents reminds me that some of Ruskin's stronger political antipathies remained with him almost to the last.

It chanced that during my short visit to Brantwood I received two letters which I valued highly. One was from Lord Rosebery, containing a request that I should offer his respectful greetings to Ruskin, and this pleased Ruskin exceedingly. The other was from Mr. Gladstone, sent on from another address. With Mrs. Severn, Ruskin's cousin, I was turning over the leaves of the latest of Scott's manuscripts, when it struck me that the handwriting of the novelist toward the end of his life bore an extraordinary resemblance to Mr. Gladstone's handwriting, as I had just received it.

To show the similarity, I took out Mr. Glad-

Ruskin's Study at Brantwood.

stone's letter and placed it on Scott's page, and certainly the likeness seemed to me, and I think to everybody else in the room except Ruskin, to be so close as to be almost startling. But Ruskin would not have it to be so. Almost without looking at the two specimens, he said repeatedly, "No, no, no!" and the heat of his tone and the flush in his face convinced me that his political and personal feelings were still powerfully in play. Apart from this incident, I saw nothing in Ruskin that made me feel that his life had left any strong or painful impression whatever on that spirit, now so gentle and at peace with all the world.

Ruskin's bedroom was, I think, the room above his sitting room, a small chamber of perhaps twelve feet by ten, covered from ceiling to floor with water-colour pictures by Turner, making the air warm with the glow and splendour of their colour. The windows of the little room looked out on a far different scene from the scenes pictured within, the white top and bare sides of Old Man, the half-frozen lake, and the great mists of the moorland floating between. And standing there in the midst of those priceless treasures, with the fiery soul beside me, now tempered with age and softened by the joys of home and the love of devoted

kindred, it was difficult to recall without emotion his glorious passage which begins, "Morning dawns as I write," or to think without tears of the day that was then so near when he who loved it so would look on the scene no more.

CHAPTER III

ROBERT BUCHANAN

ABOUT two months after Rossetti's death I was at work in my chambers in Clement's Inn on one of my articles for the *Mercury,* when somebody knocked with his knuckles on the door, and, in answer to my call, came in. It was Robert Buchanan, whom I had never seen before, a thick-set man, of medium height, with a broad, fresh-coloured face, distinctly intellectual, but certainly not ascetic or spiritual or inspired. He had seen something I had written about Rossetti, with a reference to himself, and he had come to thank me and to reproach me at the same time. In a voice that had a perceptible tremor, he said:

"Did you want to heap coals of fire on my head? Good God, man, what did you think you were doing?"

I was deeply touched by this strange manifestation of his gratitude, giving proof enough that under that rather rugged exterior a real

human heart was quivering. We became friends immediately, and if I had any momentary sense of disloyalty to my dead comrade in joining hands with one whose enmity had helped to darken the last years of his life, I persuaded myself, not without reason, that, after all, Rossetti and Buchanan had a good deal in common, and but for the devilish tangle of fate, they might even have been friends.

At that first meeting we talked of Rossetti only, and I well remember Buchanan's long silence, the quivering of his eyelids, and the moistening of his eyes, when I told him how the poet, whom he had wronged so deeply, had praised his "Lights o' Leith." A few days afterward he wrote a long letter, which was intended to explain the motive which had led him to make his unjust attack:

"In perfect frankness, let me say a few words concerning our old quarrel. While admitting freely that my article in the *Contemporary Review* was unjust to Rossetti's claims as a poet, I have ever held, and still hold, that it contained nothing to warrant the manner in which it was received by the poet and his circle. At the time it was written the newspapers were full of panegyric; mine was a mere drop of gall in an ocean of *eau sucrée*. That it could have

had on any man the effect you describe, I can scarcely believe; indeed, I think that no living man had so little to complain of as Rossetti, on the score of criticism. Well, my protest was received in a way which turned irritation into wrath, wrath into violence; and then ensued the paper war which lasted for years. If you compare what I have written of Rossetti with what his admirers have written of myself, I think you will admit that there has been some cause for *me* to complain, to shun society, to feel bitter against the world; but, happily, I have a thick epidermis and the courage of an approving conscience.

"I was unjust, as I have said; most unjust when I impugned the purity and misconceived the passion of writings too hurriedly read and reviewed *currente calamo;* but I was at least honest and fearless, and wrote with no personal malignity. Save for the action of the literary defence, if I may so term it, my article would have been as ephemeral as the mood which induced its composition. I make full admission of Rossetti's claims to the purest kind of literary renown, and if I were to criticise his poems *now*, I should write very differently. But nothing will shake my conviction that the cruelty, the unfairness, the pusillanimity has

been on the other side, not on mine. The *amende* of my dedication in 'God and the Man' was a sacred thing—between *his* spirit and mine; not between my character and the cowards who have attacked it. I thought he would understand—which would have been, and indeed is, sufficient. I cried, and cry, no truce with the horde of slanderers who hid themselves within his shadow. That is all. But when all is said there still remains the pity that our quarrel should ever have been. Our little lives are too short for such animosities. Your friend is at peace with God—that God who will justify and cherish him, who has dried his tears, and who will turn the shadow of his life-dream into full sunshine. My only regret now is that we did not meet—that I did not take him by the hand; but I am old-fashioned enough to believe that this world is only a prelude, and that our meeting may take place—even yet."

During the next two years I saw a great deal of Buchanan. We were constantly together, and I think we became sincerely attached to each other. It was impossible not to admire his compelling power, his immense vigour, his courage, and even his audacity. There was a sense in which he was the true literary man,

the born "slinger of ink." His control over his vehicle was such as I have never seen equalled, and what he could do he could do without an effort. As a journalist he was worth a wilderness of the men who were always depreciating him in the newspapers. He would write an article while they were nibbling a pen and gazing vacantly at a sheet of paper, having a quick sense of what the public wants, the art of swift assimilation, and a never-failing power of vigorous expression.

He knew life, too, and though he knew books, and knew them well, he had not spent all his days within the four walls of a library. In his youth he had gone through bitter privations, tramping the streets with David Gray, and lodging in a top room in the "New Cut," where a tender-hearted Cockney servant girl would smuggle up a dish of half cold potatoes from the kitchen in pity of the hunger of the struggling boys from Scotland.

There was a heart in him, too, and when he permitted himself to speak out of it the world had no choice but to hear, so that the time had been when, in recognition of the power, the pathos, the humour, and the undoubted literary form of his earlier poems, he was recognised as the heir-apparent to Tennyson.

That time was long passed when I came to know him, but he was still the lusty, brawny, stalwart fellow who had more than once fluttered the literary dove-cots. His hostility to the profession of letters was beginning to run to seed. He had an honest contempt for the mutual admiration of the little cliques who were then so busy tinkering up fictitious reputations, and his big, robustious body would rock with derisive laughter at the little kinking humour of what he thought the Oxford manner —the manner of the Don turned journalist.

Already he was rapidly becoming the Ishmael of literature, with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him. He would make no terms with his literary contemporaries to win their confidence or disturb their distrust. No clubs, no public dinners, no literary gatherings ever knew him, and when he saw himself left out of lists of men of letters which included battalions of weaklings, who were not fit to wipe his boots, he growled out his disgust and spat at literature.

But the spirit of literature keeps a swift revenge for the literary men who lower her flag, just as she loves the best, if she works the hardest, those who hold her standard high. Buchanan as a force in literature began to dis-

appear. The man who had written the "Ballad of Judas Iscariot" declined on inconspicuous melodrama, and wasted himself on casual journalism. Setting the intelligence of the public low, he deliberately gave them what he thought they wanted, judging of that by the quality of what he saw succeed. The high conscientiousness of early years, whereby he had seen that less than his best was less than was due from any artist to the public, had gone down in the general *débâcle* of his literary character.

Then came a more tragical development. In his last years life went hard with him. He had been an affectionate son, husband, and friend, and his dear ones were beginning to suffer. At that his rebellious spirit seemed to break all bounds, and even his faith began to fail. He seemed to me sometimes like a man at war with the Almighty. It was only the struggle of a big soul, badly beaten in the fight of life, to reconcile itself to the ways of God with men, but the Ishmael in Buchanan lying out in the desert and crying for a drink of water became a trying thing to see.

In those last years he railed at the world and nearly everything in it, but he kept a warm place in his heart for a few (his devoted sister-

in-law above everybody), and I have never heard that he wrote a word against me. Very early in our friendship he asked me to collaborate with him, and I attempted to do so, but there was nothing to correct my faults in Buchanan's undoubted qualities, and our literary partnership died almost before it was born.

After a few years we parted company, not from any quarrel, but by that gradual asundering that makes a wider breach than open rupture. I never ceased to think of him with affection, or to regret what I saw of the decay of his noble gifts, the lowering of his natural quality, and when he celebrated his sixtieth year I wrote to wish him many happy returns of the day, and to lament the space by which life and the world had divided us.

His reply was painful reading. He was ill, he had lost his mother, the world had forgotten his existence, and but for one "angel in the house," heaven alone knew what would have become of him. It was a pretty thing to wish a man many happy returns of a day that had dawned on misery that was more than he could bear. Only one good thing had emerged from his sufferings—he had put away forever all my own pitiful superstitions about a benefi-

cent Providence, who ruled the world in righteousness!

I was hurt, but not hopeless. Down to the last Ishmael was crying in the desert, but he was not unheard there, and when the end came everything was well.

CHAPTER IV

I BECOME A NOVELIST

WHEN I came up to London to become Rossetti's housemate, I brought with me the MS. of a collection of lectures which I had written while living in Liverpool. Shortly after the poet's death, when ways and means had begun to present serious problems, somebody recommended that I should submit this MS. to a certain great publishing house, and I took it in person. At the door of the office I was told to write my own name, and the name of the person I wished to see, and to state my business. I did so, and the boy who took my message brought back word that I might leave my manuscript for consideration. It seemed to me that somebody might have seen me for a minute, but I had expected too much. The manuscript was carefully tied up in brown paper, and so I left it.

After waiting three torturing weeks for the decision of the publishers, I made bold to call

again. At the same little box at the door of the office I had once more to fill up the same little document. The boy took it in, and I was left to sit on his table, to look at the desk which he had been whittling away with his penknife, to wait, and to tremble. After a while I heard a footstep returning. I thought it might be the publisher or the editor of the house. It was the boy back again. He had a pile of loose sheets of white paper in his hands. They were the sheets of my book.

"The editor's compliments, sir, and—thank you," said the boy, and my manuscript went sprawling over the table. I gathered it up, tucked it as deep as possible into the darkness, under the wings of my Inverness cape, and went downstairs, ashamed, humiliated, crushed, and broken-spirited. Not quite that, either, for I remember that as I got to the fresh air at the door, my gorge rose within me, and I cried in my heart, "By God, you shall—" and something proud and vain.

I dare say it was right and proper and in good order. The book was afterward published, and I think it sold well. I hardly know whether I ought to say that the editor should have shown me more courtesy. It was all a part of the anarchy of things which Mr. Hardy

considers the rule of life. But the sequel is worth telling. That editor became my personal friend. He is dead, and he was a good and able man. Of course he remembered nothing of this incident, and I never poisoned one hour of our intercourse by telling him how, when I was young, and a word of cheer would have buoyed me up, he made me drink the waters of Marah.

And three times since that day the publishing firm I speak of has come to me with the request that I should write a book for them. I have never been able to do so, but I have outgrown my bitterness, and, of course, I show no malice. Indeed, I have now the best reasons for wishing the great enterprise well. But if literary confessions are worth anything, this one may perhaps be a seed that will somewhere find grateful soil. Keep a good heart, even if you have to knock in vain on many doors and kick about the back stairs of the house of letters. There is room enough inside.

Such was my first attempt to become an author, but after years had passed, during which I had been occupied in daily journalism, I found myself settled in a little bungalow of three rooms in the Isle of Wight, and there at length I began to write my first novel. By this

time I had persuaded myself (perhaps wrongly) that nobody would go on writing about other people's writing who could do original writing himself, and I resolved to live on little, to earn nothing, and never to go back to London until I had written something of some sort. As nearly as I can remember, I had enough money in my purse to keep things going for four months, and if, at the end of that time, nothing had got itself done, I must go back bankrupt. Something did get itself done, but at a heavy price of labour and heart-burning.

When I began to think of a theme, I found four or five subjects clamouring for acceptance. There was the story of the Prodigal Son, which afterward became "The Deemster"; the story of Jacob and Esau, which in the same way turned into "The Bondman"; the story of Samuel and Eli, which after a fashion moulded itself finally into "The Scapegoat," as well as half a dozen other stories, chiefly Biblical, which have since been written, or are still on the forehead of the time to come.

But my first favourite at that moment was a Cumberland legend, which I had recited to Rossetti during the time we spent together in the Vale of St. John. It was one of the oldest legends of the Lake mountains, and it told of

the time of the Plague. The people were afraid to go to market, afraid to go to church, and afraid to meet on the highway. In these days a widow with two sons lived in one of the darkest of the Cumberland valleys; the younger son died, and his body had to be carried over the mountains to be buried. Its course lay across Sty Head Pass, a bleak and "brant" space where the winds are often high. The elder son, a strong-hearted lad, undertook the duty. He strapped the coffin onto the back of a young horse, and the funeral party started away. The day was wild, and on the top of the pass, where the path dips into Wastdale, between the breast of Great Gable and the heights of Scawfell, the wind rose to a gale. The horse was terrified. It broke away and galloped over the fells, carrying its burden with it. The lad followed and searched for it, but in vain, and he had to go home at last, unsatisfied.

This was in the spring, and nearly all the summer through the surviving son of the widow was out on the mountain trying to recover the runaway horse. Only once did he catch sight of it, though sometimes, as he turned homeward at night, he thought he heard in the gathering darkness, above the sough of

the wind, the horse's neigh. Then winter came, and the mother died. Once more the dead body was to be carried over the fells for burial, and once again the coffin was strapped on the back of a horse. It was an old mare that was chosen this time, the mother of the young one that had been lost.

The snow lay deep on the pass, and from the cliffs of the Scawfell pikes it hung in a great toppling mass. All went well with the little funeral party until they came to the top of the pass, and though the day was calm the son held the rein with a hand that was like a vise. But just as the mare reached the spot where the wind had frightened the young horse, there was a terrible noise; an immense body of snow had parted at that instant from the beetling heights overhead and rushed down into the valley with the movement as of a mighty earthquake and the deafening noise as of a peal of thunder. The dale echoed and re-echoed from side to side and from height to height. The old mare was affrighted. She reared, leaped, flung her master away, and galloped off. When the funeral party had recovered from their consternation they gave chase, and at length, down in a hollow place, they saw what they were in search of. It was a horse with something strapped to

its back, but when they came up with it, they found it was the *young* horse with the coffin of the younger son. They led it away, and buried the body it had carried so long. But the old mare they never recovered, and the body of the mother never found sepulchre.

Such was the legend sufficiently terrible and even ghastly, which was my favourite theme when I began to think of my first novel. Rossetti had been impressed by it, but he had strongly advised me not to tackle it. "It is strong," he said, "but it lacks sympathy, and without sympathy no novel can live."

His judgment had disheartened me, but now I thought I saw a way to meet his objection. The sympathy so necessary to the story was to be got out of the elder son. He was to think God's hand was upon him; but whom God's hand rested on had God at his right hand; so the elder son was to be a splendid fellow—brave, strong, calm, patient, long-suffering—a victim of unrequited love, a man standing square on his legs against all weathers.

About this central figure and legendary incident I first grouped a family of characters. They were heroic and eccentric, good and bad, but they all operated upon my hero. Then I began to write.

Shall I ever forget the agony of the first efforts? There was the ground to clear with necessary explanations. This I did in the way of Scott, in a long prefatory chapter. Having written the chapter, I read it aloud, and found it unutterably slow and dead. Twenty pages were gone, and the interest was not touched. Throwing the chapter aside, I began with an ale-house scene, intending to work back to the history in a piece of retrospective writing. The ale house was better, but to try its quality I read it aloud, after the Rainbow scene in "Silas Marner," and then cast it aside in despair. A third time I began, and when the ale house looked tolerable the retrospective chapter that followed it seemed flat and poor. How to begin by gripping the interest, how to tell all and yet never stop the action—these were agonising difficulties.

It took me nearly a fortnight to start that novel, sweating drops of blood at every fresh attempt. I must have written the first half volume four times at the least. After that I saw the way clearer, and got on faster. At the end of three months I had written nearly two volumes (it was in the days of the three-volume novel), and then, in good spirits, I went up to London.

My first visit was to J. S. Cotton, a close friend (at that time editor of *The Academy*), and to him I detailed the lines of my story. His rapid mind saw a new opportunity. "You want *peine forte et dure*," he said. "What's that?" I said. "An old punishment—a beautiful thing," he answered. "Where's my dear old Blackstone?" and the statute concerning the punishment for standing mute was read to me. It was just the thing I wanted for my hero, and I was in rapture, but I was also in despair. To work this fresh interest into my theme, half of what I had written would need to be destroyed!

It *was* destroyed, the interesting piece of ancient jurisprudence took a leading place in my scheme, and after two months more I got well into the third volume. Then I took my work down to Liverpool, and showed it to my friend, John Lovell. After he had read it, he said:

"I suppose you want my candid opinion?"

"Well, ye—s," I said.

"It's crude," he said. "But it only wants subediting."

Subediting!

I took it back to London, began again at the first line, and wrote every page over again.

At the end of another month the story had been reconstructed, and was shorter by some fifty pages of manuscript. It had drawn my heart's blood to cut out my "best" passages, but they were gone, and I knew the book was better. After that I went on to the end and finished with a tragedy. Then the story was sent back to Lovell, and I waited for his verdict.

My home (or what served for it) was now on the fourth floor of New Court, in Lincoln's Inn, and one morning Lovell came puffing and blowing and steaming (the good fellow was a twenty-stone man) into my lofty nest. He had reread my novel coming up in the train.

"Well?" I asked nervously.

"It's splendid," he said.

That was all the favourable criticism he offered. All save one practical and tangible bit.

"We'll give you £100 for the serial right of the story for the *Weekly*."

He offered one unfavourable criticism.

"The death of your hero will never do," he said. "If you kill that man, you'll kill your book. What's the good? Take no more than the public will give you to begin with, and by and by they'll take what *you* give *them*."

It was practical advice, but it went sorely against the grain. The death of the hero was

the natural sequel to the story; the only end that gave meaning and intention and logic to its *motif*. I had a strong predisposition toward a tragic climax to a serious story.

To close a narrative of disastrous events with a happy ending, it always seemed necessary to turn every incident into accident. That was like laughing at the reader. Comedy was comedy, but comedy and tragedy together was farce. Then a solemn close was so much more impressive. A happy ending nearly always frayed off into rags and nothingness, but a sad one closed and clasped a story as with a clasp. Besides, a tragic end might be a glorious and satisfying one, and need by no means be squalid and miserable. But all these arguments went down before my friend's practical assurance, "Kill that man, and you kill your book."

With much diffidence I altered the catastrophe and made my hero happy. Then, thinking my work complete, I asked Watts-Dunton (the friend to whose wise counsel I owed so much in those days) to read some "galley" slips of it. He thought the rustic scenes good, but advised me to moderate the dialect, and he propounded to me his well-known views on the use of patois in fiction.

"It gives a sense of reality," he said, "and also has the effect of wit, but it must not stand in the way."

The advice was sound. A man may know over much of his subject to write on it properly. I had studied Cumbrian to too much purpose, and did not realise that some of my scenes were like sealed books to the general reader. So once again I ran over my story, taking out some of the "nobbuts" and the "dustas" and the "wiltas."

My first novel was now written, but I had still to get it published. In my early days in London, while trying to live in the outer court of the calling wherein the struggle for existence is keenest and bitterest and cruellest, I conceived one day the idea of offering myself as a reader to the publishers. With this view I called on several of them, who have perhaps no recollection of my early application. I recall my interview with one of them. He was sitting at a table when I was taken into his room, and he never once raised his head from his papers to look at me. I just remember that he had a neck like a three-decker and a voice like a peahen's.

"Well, sir?" he said.

I mentioned the object of my visit.

"What can you read?"

"Novels and poems," I answered.

"Don't publish either—good-day," he said, and I went out.

But one of the very best, and quite, I think, the very oldest of publishers now living, received me differently.

"Come into my own room," he said. It was a lovely little place, full of an atmosphere that recalled the publishing house of the old days, half office, half study; a workshop where books might be made, not turned out by machinery. I read many manuscripts for that publisher, and must have learned much by the experience. And now that my novel was finished I took it to him first. He offered to publish it the following year. That did not suit me, and I took my book elsewhere. Next day I was offered £50 for my copyright. That was wages at the rate of about four shillings a day for the time I had been actually engaged upon the work, straining brain and heart and every faculty. Nevertheless, one of my friends urged me to accept it.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it is a story of the past, and therefore not one publisher in ten will look at it."

I used strong language, and then took my

novel to Chatto & Windus. Within a few hours Mr. Chatto made me an offer which I accepted.

The story I have told of many breakdowns in the attempt to write my first novel may suggest the idea that I was merely serving my apprenticeship to fiction. It is true that I was, but it would be wrong to conclude that the writing of a novel has been plain sailing with me ever since. Let me "throw a crust to my critics," and confess that I am serving my apprenticeship still. Every book that I have written since has offered even greater difficulties. Not one of the little series but has at some moment been a despair to me. There has always been a point of the story at which I have felt confident that it must kill me. I have written nine novels (that is to say about ninety) and sworn as many oaths that I would never begin another. The public expects a novel to be light reading. It may revenge itself for an occasional disappointment by remembering that a novel is not always light writing.

CHAPTER V

R. D. BLACKMORE

ONE of the kindest things said about my first novel at the moment of its publication was that it smelt of the peat, which was the distinguishing odour of "Lorna Doone," and this coupling of my first work of fiction with Blackmore's masterpiece quickly led to a personal friendship with one of the least known but most fascinating personalities of my time.

Whether Blackmore wrote in the first instance to me or I to him I cannot now recall, but among his earliest letters I find one which says:

"Your publishers have kindly sent me a copy of 'The Shadow of a Crime,' and I am reading it carefully. Your style does not permit any skipping. No work that does so is of much value. So far as I can yet judge, the book is full of power and true imagination. To the critical gift I have no claim; but I seem to

myself to know when I come across genuine matter. And you have also that respect for yourself and your readers, which is a *sine qua non* for the achievement of great work. However, I will not show my own deficiency in that quality by offering premature remarks."

But Blackmore could be a frank critic as well as a generous appreciator, and a day or two later than the date of this letter he wrote again in terms of much more limited praise.

"I would not write again," he says, "until I had read your book through, which I have now done with great care. My opinion is of very little value; but so far as I can distinctly form one it is as follows: There is any amount of vigour and power and some real pathos (which is, of course, a part of power), also there are many other merits, a strong English style, great knowledge of character, keen observation, and much originality.

"But I think you will improve upon this book vastly as experience grows. The incidents appear to me to be huddled, without sense of proportion now and then, and there is much strain upon credulity. But I am loath to find fault, knowing I am not a skilled workman myself."

After the publication of my second and third novels Blackmore was no less generous and no less kindly.

"It has always seemed to me," he said, "that your turn of mind and power of creation are specially dramatic, and that you will write if once you take to that form a very grand and moving play. There is no one who can do that now, so far, at least, as I can judge, and I shall be proud if I live long enough to see you achieve it.

"But for novel writing you have not *yet* (according to my small judgment) the sense of proportion and variety which are needful for pleasant work. I have read with great care your latest book, and have admired and been stirred by it. But to my mind (which is not at all a critic one) there is not the sliding and the quiet shifting and the sense of pause which are perhaps only the mechanical parts of great work, but help to lift it. I cannot exactly express my meaning, and I have no science to second it; and I know that I cannot do the thing itself, and never attempt it consciously."

There was always encouragement as well as counsel in Blackmore's excellent letters, and little glimpses into his own life and character

that were always interesting, and sometimes beautiful.

"I conclude that you have left the Isle of Man," he wrote, "and hope you are working at a book, *quocunque jeceris stabit*. Any work of yours will now command a larger circle than the critics, to whom, like myself, you owe little. If the matter were of more interest, I would print the *first notices* of 'Lorna Doone,' which they are now quoting as a standard. I have them somewhere, and a damp bed they are to smother a shy guest in. But you know well enough how these men fumble the keys of an open door."

I met Blackmore first in the earliest days of our acquaintance. He came to the gate of his garden at Teddington to meet me on my alighting from the train. An elderly man, of more than middle height and full proportions, with a clear-cut face, clean shaven except for a tuft of gray hair, in the manner of fifty years ago, down the cheek. He wore a straw hat with a wide brim, and gave generally the impression of a comfortable old Quaker. His eyes were neither large nor brilliant, and gave no hint of having looked on the burning bush. The expression was calm, and there was a solid strength in face, figure, and bearing. I should

have said he was then a man in good health, on fairly good terms with life, and that he had certainly slept o' nights.

That day our talk was not literary. He had a large garden, which he thought he cultivated for profit, although it had always involved him in a steadily increasing loss. His wife, who was lately dead, used to say that but for the "profits" of his work in the garden they might live in ease and content. But Blackmore knew what he was doing. He loved his garden, he loved his trees, above all he loved his pears, and literature can have had no rewards so dear to him as his annual deficit on his seventeen acres. We walked over them for several hours, and he talked of his fruit and flowers with as much tenderness as if they had been human beings. God had given him no other children, and he was then, I think, quite alone. Somewhat later his affectionate young niece came to take charge of the place his wife had left vacant, and the lonely man became less lonely, but it was well for him always that he had his garden to love and care for.

His occupations as a market gardener gave him a good deal of amusement. He was full of stories of his experiences with his men, with the

carters who took his fruit to Covent Garden, and with the people he bought his seeds and manure from. The general effect of these stories was that he knew he was often cheated, and that he enjoyed the simplicity of the means employed to hoodwink him. One story, I remember, was of a carter, who dropped into the trap of the boy in the legend, who rendered his master an account, beginning: "A shilling's worth of eggs—eighteen pence." The fellow worked for Blackmore for many years at a workman's wages, and while his master lost on an average five hundred pounds a year on growing fruit, his gardener built a row of cottages on selling it. The whirlwind came, however, one Saturday night, when the man had the ill luck to return home from market drunk, and the money in his purse showed a surplus of several pounds over his account. Another of Blackmore's stories was of buying manure from a farmer, who knew nothing of his celebrity outside the business of market gardening.

"How much a ton?" said Blackmore.

"Well," said the farmer, "I'm charging the *gentlemen* seven-and-six, but *you* shall have it for five."

Blackmore's house stood in the middle of his

garden, and was a plain square structure of the simplest kind. He had built it himself, and it expressed his own character in the absence of every unnecessary ornament. No house could be less like the literary man's home, which usually gathers about it signs and symbols of its class. Comparatively few books, and those he had were chiefly classical, such as one might find in the house of a schoolmaster or the library of a monastery, with a fair sprinkling of treatises on horticulture. Novels there were, but mainly presentation copies of works of friends, with here and there a series of Dickens and Thackeray.

His workroom was, I think, also his bedroom, an upstairs room of medium size, whereof the most notable feature was a multitudinous collection of meerschaum pipes of varying size and degree of rosy colour. He was a great smoker, and loved to have his huge pipes about him. There were few photographs except those of Sir Richard Owen and certain other friends of earlier years. One thing only would have betrayed the fact that this was the home of Blackmore. On the drawing-room table there was a large album devoted exclusively to the portraits of girls called Lorna, after his beloved heroine of that name. A

lovely collection of sweet faces which he could not help being proud of. For he was godfather to a vast family of beautiful children.

The fifteen years following my first visit to Teddington ripened our friendship to the closest intimacy. He had few friends among literary people, and except for Thomas Hardy, of whom he had seen little in later years, he had hardly a personal acquaintance of his own class. My visits to Blackmore were not as frequent as they would have been but for the distance which separated our homes, but our correspondence was almost constant, and I have many of his charming letters. They are among the best letters I have ever received, bright, humorous, full of pretty phrases, with extraordinary power of condensed expression, rhythmical in style, and generous in tone.

Strange as it may seem to say so, Blackmore was not naturally a story-teller, and his success in fiction is only another proof (of which George Eliot's case is, I think, the most notable example) that it is possible to write great novels without being by natural gift a story-teller at all. One knows the story-teller the moment he speaks, just as one recognises the humourist the instant he enters the room, and Blackmore's conversation, though greatly in-

teresting, had never the vivacity, the surprise, and the grip of the talk of the man who is born with the faculty for telling a story. It was, therefore, not surprising to hear him say he became a novelist by the pressure of circumstance.

I think he told me that after leaving the university he was for a while a tutor, and then entered the chambers of a conveyancer named Warner, and was called to the bar. But no practice came to him, and he began to write—on classical subjects first by the choice of his mind, for he was an excellent Greek scholar. Nobody wanted his scholarship, however, and he began to ask himself what the public really did want. His first attempts at popularity were in the way of the drama, and he wrote on a Scandinavian subject a play which was never produced. It had a powerful dramatic incident and some excellent dialogue, but no motive and no structure. Failing to interest the actors, he went next to the public direct with an essay in fiction. Here his success was better, although not quick, and culminated in the great triumph of "Lorna Doone."

Not being naturally a story-teller, though a splendid recorder of stories, he invented very

little, and depended largely on fact and memory. I think he told me that for almost everything he had written he had the authority of some original. John Ridd had his counterpart in life, and Blackmore's old father, a clergyman of the old type, had served his son for a model several times. I think Lorna herself came more directly out of the heart of her creator, and I see Blackmore's own nature in many of his children, both male and female, but he did not greatly trust himself in the invention of incident, and the wings of his imagination always kept close to the ground. Hence, no doubt, the vivid reality of his narrative, and hence, also, the slowness of his pace.

Perhaps the thing that struck one first in Blackmore was his impatience of the great fame of "Lorna Doone." In all soberness he would have you believe that the success of that book, beginning nearly a year after its publication, was due to a blunder on the part of the public that, coming at the moment of the marriage of the Princess Louise, the story had something to do with the Marchioness of Lorne. And then his joy at the vast welcome given to his offspring was always a little marred by vexation that the public made a favourite of

Lorna, to the disadvantage of all her younger sisters.

Blackmore was not philosophical in his impatience of Lorna's preëminence in public favour. He did not make allowance for the natural limitations of the public. The author who has won the great love of a section of the people for one story or one character must never hope and never desire to oust that love in favour of another story or character. He must go, if he can, to another section of the people and turn up fallow ground. If he cannot do that, he is wiser to be silent, for it is not enough that his later books should be as good as his earlier ones of the same kind to win the same favour—they must be a hundredfold better. Hence the repeated cry that authors fail of their former strength, when they are usually only beating at the same door. Blackmore suffered more than any author of the time from this cuckoo cry that he had written one book only, while in truth he had written half a dozen that were enough to make the reputations of as many lesser men.

It is true, however, that toward the end his higher quality failed him. No wonder it was so, for his bodily health was failing him also, and with it some faculties of mind, memory

above all. One day I found him making, on the flyleaf of his manuscript book, a list of the characters of a new novel, with particulars of their ages and the colour of their eyes and hair. Another day he was writing the third version of a short Christmas story, which he set no store by beyond the fee it was to bring him, and that was eaten up by the time he had spent on it.

It was pitiful, but then there was that beloved garden to keep going, and another spur less easy to talk about—the desire not to be entirely overlooked in the race of life, or to be written about as if one were already dead. Blackmore knew that his generation was forgetting him as a living man, and the thought must have hurt, but it never rankled. He saw younger men arise, and he was too strong, too generous, too much of a man to grudge them the places they won for themselves. He had had his own day, and on the whole the world had been good to him, and life had been worth living. So let others have their turn, and God bless them!

Blackmore's health had been failing him for years. First a strange half-paralysis of one hand, then occasional internal pain, then pain every day and every hour. A change to the

South Coast, to Wales, and then back to Teddington, but no sensible improvement. Some trouble of the colon at last that was sure to kill him. His letters were always cheerful, but he was not buoying himself up with any false hopes. The end was coming, and it was only a question of soon or late. I saw him last in the early autumn. The full proportions were gone, and he was only the shadow of the man I had known first. The old workroom bedroom was his sick room now, and medicine bottles filled up every corner of the shelves not occupied by the big pipes. His pain was constant, and he was always taking drugs to relieve it, but his cheerfulness continued. Of course all work was at an end, but in the long hours of the sleepless nights he was still reading. The series of Dickens was standing him in good stead.

"He is the only one I can read now," he said.

I was going to Rome for the winter, and we both knew that was the last we were to see of each other. In the best way I could, I tried to tell him how much his friendship had been to me; how it had strengthened and stimulated me; and then to say, with what delicacy I could, that it must be a splendid thing, after

all, to look back on a long life without a stain, and on having produced several works of high quality, and on leaving one novel behind that would surely be ranked with the best twelve of the century.

He listened to me with the simplicity of his sincere nature, and seemed to take comfort from what I said. A few weeks later I received a letter from him saying that he was now forbidden to see anybody, and was an exile for the short remainder of his life. He bade me good-bye, and returning to what I had said, he wrote a few tender and touching words about myself, and the life that might be before me. It is my own fault if I am not the better as long as I live for having come so close to one of the truest hearts and finest intellects of the age.

CHAPTER VI

MY FIRST MANX NOVEL

I HAD written two novels with their scenes in Cumberland, my mother's country, before I thought of carrying out the suggestion of Rossetti that I should try to become the novelist of Manxland, but now I began to see how readily the island lent itself to literary treatment, not merely for its own sake, but also for the sake of those great themes of human sin and sorrow which are never so well illustrated as when brought down to a little scene, a narrow focus, from the general to the particular. So I went with my project of becoming a Manx novelist to consult a famous Manxman of his day, the Rev. Hugh Stowell Brown.

Brown disapproved of it altogether. "Don't attempt it," he said. "If you do, you will have a lasting disappointment. The readers of novels don't care one straw about the Isle of Man. Nobody cares about it, and I

would earnestly counsel you to dismiss the thought."

Fortunately for myself, I think, I saw reasons for doubting the wisdom of Brown's advice, and, by way of experiment, I wrote a little Manx story which no one remembers now, except in America, where they are so indulgent to my failure that they sell it at five cents in tens of thousands. But under happier inspiration I tried again. In dismissing me with his wet blanket, my friend had said:

"But if you *must* write about that God-forsaken little island, you ought to go to my brother Tom."

I did not go to his brother Tom, but with characteristic sweetness his brother Tom came to me, and thus began one of the tenderest and truest friendships of my life, my friendship with the racy, the brilliant, the entirely charming and delightful author of "Fo'c's'le Yarns," the most loyal, the most generous, the most unselfish of men. If I quote from the letters he wrote to me at the beginning of our acquaintance more than one passage which modesty might call upon me to suppress, I shall do so with one object only—to reveal to the reader the large generosity, the measureless charity, the splendid if too lavish appreciativeness

which made T. E. Brown, for all who knew him, the most fascinating of friends.

"It may be late," he wrote, "but even so I must write to tell you with what pleasure I have read your Cumberland story. I think it is wholly delightful. The style, too, is admirable; in fact, it is a style, and a very fine one. We are now looking out, somewhat nervously, for a successor to George Eliot, and we should, many of us, be well content to see a successor to Mrs. Gaskell. I feel that you belong to this rank of novelists, and that the sweet gravity of your manner, and the total absence of straining, bring you perhaps nearer to the latter than to the former. But these circumstances of distinction are very great, and have gladdened many beside me. Please pardon this intrusion upon your privacy. I would not have ventured to address you thus, if I had not reason to believe that you are, remotely, it may be, a fellow-countryman of mine. Am I wrong in supposing that you derive your second name from the Isle of Man? You published, some time ago, in the Liverpool *Mercury,* a tale of Manx life, which much interested me, and served rather to justify my conjecture.

"I am a Manxman, with a root in Cumbria, and am passionately fond of both countries;

Tynwold Hill, the Ancient Mount of Laws, Isle of Man.

consequently I am, in some sort, made to be one of your most sympathetic readers.

"It is possible that you may have read a book of mine called 'Fo'c's'le Yarns,' in which I have tried to tell a few Manx stories. If, as is indeed most probable, my little venture has not come under your notice, I would esteem it an honour if you would allow me to send you a copy. My object, however, in writing to you now is to assure you of my warm admiration and sympathy. The mention of my own book you will, I trust, regard as an attempt to produce credentials of my aptness to feel the sympathy which I have tried to express."

If this letter indicated a breadth of sympathy that was apt to lose itself in generosity, I will quote again to show that Brown could be a very severe as well as a very appreciative critic. When I began to lay the keel for my first serious Manx novel I sent a scenario to the author of "Fo'c's'le Yarns," and this is part of his reply:

"Thanks for this admission to the secrets of your workshop. The story is most interesting. I think it best to return the sketch, as it is convenient for purposes of reference.

"It could not possibly be placed in the Isle of Man nor timed in the nineteenth century.

"The Isle of Man does not give you the remoteness of place which you want. Norway might, Kamchatka might! but the Isle of Man —no!

"Then as to time:

"The history of the Isle of Man since the Revestment (1765?) is not legendary, nor has it been otherwise than very clearly defined since the Reformation. It is an eventless history, but quite ascertained, and rigid within its narrow compass. The constitution has been singularly unbroken; there is not the faintest hint of any such resolution as you postulate. The House of Keys was coöptative in my own time, and the change to the popular method of election was the merest migration 'from the blue bed to the brown.'

"The stage is inadequate for your romance, and moreover it is quite occupied by the most obstinate fixtures. Your Dooiney (*sic*) Mooar is less than a fable. Where can you get him in? He is not, I suppose, the Earl of Derby, or the Duke of Athol; but, if he is not, he ought to be, for these gentlemen hold the field, and you can't get rid of them. It is impossible to conceive the privileged class, or nobles, of whom you speak. The fact is, you would take the Isle of Man as the merest

physical basis, and construct upon it a whole system of manners, institutions, a social system, in short, which it never knew. It can't be done at the distance; it can't be done at all.

"Now, why not cut away your socio-politico-revolutionary setting altogether, and rely, as no doubt you desire to do, on the sheer humanities? The Dooiney Mooar need not be a Lear, but he might be an old Manx gentleman; and instead of resigning a seigniority, he might resign his landed estate. Such a person, and grouped around him nearly all the rest of your story, you could place about the year 1800. The Duke of Athol held a sort of court in those days; he brought over with him to the island a choice assortment of swashbucklers and captains and miscellaneous blackguards. . . . This Athol episode is, I think, capable of treatment; but it brings us perilously near our own time. Bishop Wilson was an 'epoch-making' personage. The Church and State question was then prominent. He was a complicated man, or, at any rate, a composite one. Never was man more beloved, never was there a serener saint, never a more brutal tyrant. But why seek this sort of person in the Isle of Man? Think of Laud and his tremendous stage. Has any one

ever 'done' him, and the robin coming into his study, and 'all to that'?

"But yours is a Romance? Not an unconditional Romance, though, I suppose? Your sketch, as related to a background, is more like a Fiction founded upon fiction, or, to express it nautically, Fiction-by-fiction-half-fiction-with-a-little-bit-of-fiction."

An opinion like that was not to be gainsaid, and I went to work again, getting a little closer to Manx soil, though still conscious that my theme was floating over the real Isle of Man as over an island of Prospero that had the interest and perhaps the charm without the responsibilities of an actual country. In this second effort I had the constant sympathy and assistance of my correspondent, and when at length my work was done, the best reward that came to me was the whole-hearted enthusiasm with which my first Manx novel was received by the brilliant Manxman.

"I have broken a finger and can hardly guide a pen," he wrote, "but I must write at least a scratch or two to tell you of the delight with which I have read the new book. I confess the first volume did not attract me much. The quotations from 'Fo'c's'le Yarns' are stitched on in a patchy way, like Dick-Quayle-Vessey's

buttons. Afterward you shake yourself free from these tags and bobs, and your Manx does not suffer for it. Do you feel nervous about this dialect business? I think, if I were you, I'd drop it.

"You seem to have used a poor lecture of mine on Manx Proverbs. Again, I should say 'drop it'! and *sic melius situm.*

"The Proverbs seem lugged in, and some of them hang in the air *à propos de bottes.* To me all this kind of thing gives an air of weakness. But in the second vol. we rise to very noble work indeed. Here I have little to do but to confess my warmest admiration, and so on to the very end."

Then follow five or six pages in Brown's minute and delicate hand of just and searching criticism, coupled with splendid if extravagant praise, and then this characteristic passage:

"I do so rejoice in that stark atmosphere—gray, grim, almost colourless; the very style is *in outline*; no fat paint, no prettiness, no ornament—dark silver, dark *steel,* if you like. Mind, I would not have you overdo this; your sentences are just on the point of becoming jerky; they are rigid, but you must not let them become abrupt, snapped off by the keenness of their own internal tension. It is extraor-

dinary how whole pages of this book affect me as beautiful frostwork; the icicles seem to ring in the thin air.

"But I do like this; partly it is a *νέμεσις*—i. e., I have a savage sort of exultation in the thought that to you our island is not a mere fairy scene of the 'lovely' and the 'sweet' and the 'really you know such a charming little place'—such ferns, such mosses—positively demmee a little paradise of primeval simplicity not incapable of Lawn-Tennis!

"Lord God! What a reception for the Edwins and Angelinas—this cold stern rebuke of yours! But to the *συνετοί*, to those who know, what comfort, what ghostly consolation in this *dourness*! Why, there is not even a picnic, is there?

"You have evidently given up the notion of a story which we discussed some time ago; you had thought of a story which would be based upon some revolutionary social change. I thought this would transcend the little Manx canvas. I remember—you spoke of Lear and Macbeth, and so people do, but it's really Gervinus-Dowden, and you are well rid of it.

"Your story fits the Isle of Man like a lid to a box. Now if you had gone fumbling about after æons and transition æons and the

progress of society, God damn it, man! where should we have been? Adrift upon the sea of nowhere in the good ship *Utopia*, Captain Οὖτις. As it is, I have but to unstopper this alabaster box of precious ointment, and up leaps the genuine Manx perfume so that the house is filled with the savour thereof. Never mind the little hitches of dialect, never mind Dick-Quayle-Vessey's buttons! Whether it's the blood in you, or the poet and diviner, you know all about it, you need not that any should tell you concerning Man, for you know what is Man, and that in two senses."

Rather later Brown wrote an amusing letter on the fact that for nearly a year after publication of this first Manx novel the island itself appeared to be totally unaware of its existence.

"I am perfectly amazed that, as yet, no notice of your book has appeared in the Manx papers. But they are so curious, these Manx pressmen! Conceive these worthy persons week after week cramming their sheets with Reports of Tynwald, and Local Companies, with the facetiæ of Auctioneers, the recriminations of Town Commissioners, the lucubrations of Lockerby *v.* Cowin of "The Belvedere," and not a word, so far as I know, in recognition of the fact that they have been caught to the

breast of genius, and that when all their little turmoils shall have passed into the Limbo of fatuities, 'The Deemster' will live in the literature of the English nation, their own descendants abashed and wondering, and asking what their fathers meant by an indifference so stupid and so unaccountable. Of course I can see that the year 1887 must always be an epoch in Manx history, the year 'The Deemster' was published, not the year of the three rival steamboat companies."

It is hard for me to hold my hand in quoting from Brown's letters, and if I have already gone too far in reproducing my own glorification, I ask my readers to believe that of all the rewards that have come to me for my books the most precious by far was the fact that certain of them were clasped to the breast of the man of genius who wrote "Fo'c's'le Yarns."

I have written several Manx novels since that first one, calling up as from an inexhaustible granary the crops of incident and character which I had unconsciously gathered in my youth, and perhaps it is by these books, whatever their shortcomings, that my name is best known to the public in general, but it has always been a source of pathetic amusement to me to remember how the island itself received

its first novelist. If novels had been written about it before, that fact had made no impression upon its consciousness, and if dialect poems of great raciness and charm had been published by Brown, the rumour of them had unhappily not gone far. But now for the first time a writer of story-books had penetrated into its households, getting into the heart of the country, going into the farm houses, and deliberately sitting down by the turf fire in the "chollagh." The outside world cannot understand what that means; but we who are of the soil and have visions of stern old Churchmen and grim old Methodists in every village, who never saw a novel in their lives, and would not have touched one with the longest "grip" if it had been tossed over the tail-board of a cart, can realise the feeling with which the island must have grasped the fact that a degenerate son of her own was (as the worthy preacher on the "plan-beg" put it) "actually earning his living by telling lies."

It was not at once, however, that our sober, class-leading island reconciled itself to the idea that these novels were fictions at all. I was constantly hearing them discussed as fact. Shortly after the publication of "The Deemster" a good Manxman wrote to tell me that

he had known Dan Mylrea from his boyhood up, that he had often warned the poor boy against the way he was going, and that, when drink got the better of him at last, and he killed his cousin Ewan, he had come to his house on the night of the murder and given him the knife with which he had committed the crime—and my correspondent had kept it ever since.

After "The Bondman," I chanced on an old Manxman in Kirk Maughold, who told me he had known the place all his life, and he remembered Adam Fairbrother and the six big, lazy brothers, and the girl Greeba, and the mill at Port-e-Vullin (for it was "himself that felled it"), but he was "plagued mortal" to fix Jason, the Icelander, and he couldn't meet with any one in the parish who remembered anything about him. After "The Manxman," a shrewd old friend of mine, living by the water-trough on Ballure, conceived the idea that he was the hero of that story, a photographer photographed him in that character, and now the good canny man does a comfortable business by selling souvenirs of himself as the only original Pete Quilliam, whom Kitty Creegan was so heartless as to run away from.

But whatever the attitude of the Isle of Man

Runic Crosses at Douglas Kirk, Braddon.

toward the novels that are chiefly associated with my name, I count it as a sufficient return for all the labour they gave me that they brought the brotherly friendship of T. E. Brown. Rossetti alone excepted, he was the most brilliant and fascinating creature I have ever known. Half sailor, half parson, as W. E. Henley happily described him, a thick-set, almost "stocky" person to look upon, with a roll in his walk, and a sort of lurch in his talk, too, with a square jaw, a moist and glistening eye, a mouth that could be as firm as if cast in bronze and then as soft as if blown in foam, strong yet tender, full of the joy of life, delighting in the mere sense of being alive, loving the mountains and the sea and the sky and the song of birds, but humanity above everything, and woman above all—he was a man, and I think a great one.

So unusual a mixture of saint and, let me say, sinner, of scholar and poet, and parson and ordinary human being I have never met in any other being. He was capable of the highest flights of the spirit when it is alone with God and feels the knitting together of the riven tissues, the dew of Hermon, the balm of Gilead; but there was no sanctimoniousness about Brown; no sickly and mawkish religios-

ity; he loved to adjust his ideas to the rugged level of everyday life, to tune his talk to the common *lingua vulgaris* (with an occasional "Damn it all, man!"), whatever conventions were made to bleed. No affectation ever touched him, no pretence, no humbug of any kind. As a poet he had the fulness of maternal delight in all that came up from the depths of his being, and as a man he had the never-failing joy of his masculinity.

He had been Vice-Principal of Clifton College, and when he retired from his post he made his home in the Isle of Man. With no material interest in the welfare and prosperity of his native island, with few (how few!) intellectual associates there, parting from the friends and ways of life of thirty years, nevertheless when the burden of his work was done he returned to the Isle of Man because he loved it, because it was linked with the tenderest memories of his childhood and the fondest recollections of his youth, because the graves of his kindred were there, and he had heard the mysterious call that comes to a mans' heart from the soil that gave him birth.

I suppose there was a sense in which I heard it, too, for shortly after Brown went back to the Island I also returned to it. And then—

though there was so great a difference between us—difference of age, character, and attainments—we became the closest friends, the most constant companions. We tramped the glens and climbed the hills together, and Brown would lie on the heather for sheer love of the odour of the earth and plunge in the "dubs" of cool water that tumbled and roared in the deafening caverns of the rocks.

Five years only were given him to indulge his great love of home, yet how much he got into them! How he spent himself for the Manx people, without a thought of himself! If only a handful of his countrymen called to him he came at their bidding. He was at everybody's service, everybody's command. Distance was as nothing even to his failing strength, time as nothing, labour as nothing, and the penalties he paid he did not count.

Sometimes his friends have thought that the Island did not appreciate all this, did not realise it to the full, did not rightly apprehend the sacrifices that were being made, or the generous disproportion of the man to the work which he allowed himself to do. But there can be no question of that kind now. Manxmen and Manxwomen know to-day that the Island lost in Brown the greatest man who was ever born

to it, the finest brain, the noblest heart, the largest nature that we can yet call Manx. We do not point to his scholarship merely, though that was splendid, or to the place he won in life, though it was high and distinguished; or yet to his books, though they were full of the fire of genius and racy of the soil he loved the best. None of these answer entirely to the idea we have of the man we knew and loved so well. But the bright and brilliant soul, so strong, so humorous, so tender, so easily touched to sympathy, so gloriously gifted, so beautifully unselfish—this is the idea that answers to our memory of the first of Manxmen in the present age or any other.

When I pass from the Island's loss to my own I can hardly trust myself to speak. I saw him last at my own house at Greeba on a day in 1897, when I was about to leave home for a visit to Rome, and I think he had walked across the mountains (no unusual adventure) to bid me good-bye. His health had been failing for some time, and he was rather silent and I thought sad. At length, when we were alone, in reply to some remark of my own, he said:

"I don't wish to frighten you, but I want to tell you that . . . I'm afraid I will not be here when you come back."

He would die soon; he felt it; he knew it; he was not going to make any fuss about it; life on the whole had been worth living, and he was content.

I did not believe for a moment that he was right, and I would not take his warning seriously, though I see now that I might have done so, knowing how free he was from morbid thoughts. All the same, the last letter I wrote before leaving home was written to him saying, "Good-bye and God bless you," and such other words of farewell as one sends to one's friend on the eve of a long journey. But he was to take the longer journey of the two, and I had got no farther than Paris when four lines in the *Figaro*—meagre in their details, full of errors, but only too obviously authentic—told me that Brown was dead.

I felt then, and I feel now, that with Brown's death something of myself died, too, the better part of myself. I had leaned on him as on an elder brother, a wiser, stronger, purer, serener nature, to whom I could go at any time for solace and counsel and support. I did nothing without consulting him, and took no serious step without his sanction. My stories were told to him first, and he was always aware of my plans and intentions. If I have done anything

which deserves to be remembered, it is only myself can know how much of what is good in it is but a reflection from the light of his splendid genius. He was the subtlest of appreciators, the most enthusiastic of admirers, the most inspiring of critics, the most loyal of friends. To my moods of depression he brought the buoyancy of his big heart, so full of hope and courage, sustaining me amid the despondency of failure as well as the rarer, but no less real, despondency of success.

CHAPTER VII

WILKIE COLLINS

ONE of the best of the rewards which my first Manx novel brought me was the friendship of Wilkie Collins, and I value among the most priceless of my possessions the letter he wrote to me after reading it. It was a long letter full of generous and noble praise, but full, too, of candid and valuable advice.

"Now let me think of the next book that you will write," he said, "and let me own frankly where I see some room for improvement in what the painters call 'treatment of the subject.' When you next take up your pen, will you consider a little whether your tendency to dwell on what is grotesque and violent in human character does not require some discipline? Look again at 'The Deemster,' and at some of the qualities and modes of thought attributed to his nephew, Dan.

"Again—your power as a writer sometimes

misleads you, as I think, into forgetting the value of contrast. The picture which your story presents of terror and grief wants relief. Individually and collectively, there is variety in the human lot. We are no more continuously wretched than we are continuously happy. Next time I want more of the humour which breaks out so delightfully in old Quilleash. Those breaks of sunshine in your splendid cloudy sky will be a truer picture of nature—and will certainly enlarge the number of your admiring readers. Look at two of the greatest of tragic stories, 'Hamlet' and 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' and see how Shakespeare and Scott take every opportunity of presenting contrasts and brightening the picture at the right place.

"I believe you have not even yet written your best book, and here you have the proof of my sincerity."

I did not know Wilkie Collins long, but I knew him well. He had written saying that I should be welcome to call upon him, but must be prepared to find him suffering the domestic agonies of moving from one place of abode to another.

"If you don't object to a room without a carpet or a curtain, I can declare myself still

possessed of a table and two chairs, pen and ink, cigars, and brandy and water, and I should be delighted to see you."

I found him in the heart of London, for he was then living in Gloucester Place. The house was large and rather dingy. The walls were panelled, the stairs were of stone, the hall was cold, and the whole house cheerless. The door had been answered by a man-servant, whose nervousness and diffidence told a long story in advance of the habits of close retirement observed by the master I had come to see. On the walls of the room that I was shown into hung pictures of the greatest interest. There was an etching of Dickens that I had never seen anywhere else, showing a healthier and handsomer face than the one familiar to the public, without any signs either of the days of "Hungerford Market," or of the death's hand that lay heavy on it at the last. Then there was a portrait of Collins himself in the earliest years of his manhood, boyish, even girlish, almost childlike in its simple expression, and with the forehead that belonged to Collins alone—round, protrusive, and overhanging heavily. There was another portrait of the author by Millais, and a photograph by Sarony, of New York, representing Collins

when the boyish face was half hidden by an abundant beard, and the youthful head had grown leonine.

I had first seen Wilkie some years before, when he was pointed out to me by Rossetti. It was on one of our melancholy drives for fresh air and exercise, through the streets and parks of London, usually with the windows of the carriage up and the poet thrust back into the corner of the carriage, behind the folds of his Inverness cape, and under the shadow of his broad-brimmed hat, pulled low over his face. The hidden eyes that missed nothing saw a figure that they recognised walking past us on the footpath.

"That must be Wilkie Collins," said Rossetti, and I looked and saw a small, elderly man, gray-haired and gray-bearded, large-eyed and lion-headed, round-shouldered and stooping heavily. That was my first glimpse of Collins, and, swift as it was, it left its vivid impression, so that when he came into the room to welcome me, I remembered in a moment that I had seen him before.

But he had grown feebler in the interval, paler in the face, and more flabby. His eyes at that time were large and protuberant, and they had the vague and dreamy look that is

sometimes seen in the eyes of the blind. Perhaps I should come near to giving the right impression if I were to add that the expression of Collins's eyes at this period of his life was that of a man to whom chloroform had just been administered. They fixed my attention instantly, and Collins saw that it was so. Perhaps he suspected that I read their strange look by the light of my experience with Rossetti; perhaps he was loath to trust me then as he trusted me later; but before we had been talking long he interrupted the conversation and said:

"I see that you can't keep your eyes off my eyes, and I ought to say that I've got gout in them, and that it is doing its best to blind me."

I found him a good and animated talker, never spontaneous, but always vigorous and right. His voice was full and of even quality; a good voice, not at all a great one. In manner he was quiet, a little nervous, and not prone to much gesture. He sat, while he talked, with his head half down, and his eyes usually on the table; but he looked into one's face from time to time, and then his gaze was steady and encouraging, and one never felt for a moment that his eye was upon one.

Indeed, without being the most "magnetic" of men, Collins was a man to set one at one's ease, to get the best out of one, to send one away with a comfortable feeling toward one's self, and yet a man with a proper sense of personal dignity. You never knew it for dignity, and that was exactly where its strength lay. The same large grasp of fact and command of detail which one found in the novels one found in the novelist. If his conversation was not luminous and large, if his outlook on life was not wide, if his horizon was not far away, neither were they little and narrow and near. His insight was sure, his memory unfailing, and his invention strong.

At that first meeting we talked on many subjects. I remember that I wanted information on the copyright law, for the plot of one of my novels had been taken by some dramatic thief, and I had a mind to fight him. Collins was very full, very precise, and very emphatic on that subject, having paid bitterly for special knowledge over two of his own stories, "The Woman in White" and "The New Magdalen." He was quite sure that I had not a leg to stand on, though of course he joined his wail with mine over the iniquitous law that recognised a copyright in words and none in ideas.

Wilkie Collins.

Then we talked of French writers, and he said something that I cannot remember of how he met with Victor Hugo, whose plays, no less than his novels, he admired. But the elder Dumas among French novelists was clearly the god of his idolatry, and "The Three Musketeers" was his ideal of a great story. He had been many times in the way of meeting Dumas, but had never done so. Then he talked of Scott, whom he valued beyond words of appraisement, thinking "The Bride of Lammermoor" the greatest of all prose tragedies. Something he said, too, of Dickens, but only in the character of a near and dear friend, with a perceptible sinking of the soft voice and a noticeable melting of the gentle eyes. Charles Reade was also mentioned in relation to a memoir that had then been lately published, and the impression left with me was that the rougher side of Reade's character had never been seen by Collins except as the whole world saw it in the squabbles of the newspapers.

I seem to have dwelt too long on this first interview, but, indeed, it was the type of many interviews that followed it. I consulted him on schemes for novels, and discussed with him the structure of several of my stories. He was always kindly, always alert, always enthusi-

astic, always capable of entering into the hopes and aims of a younger literary colleague.

His letters were as full of pith as his conversation. Nothing appeared in them more frequently than his boyish delight in his work. It was not done easily, but with great and often grievous labour—labour of conception, of construction, and of repeated writing and rewriting—and yet he held to it, clung to it, and when torn from it by sickness he returned to it in health with the fiercest eagerness of the literary aspirant. Never was authorship less of a trade to any author, though he was a competent business man, and knew how to make the most of his market. To write stories was a passion to him, and he was as much a slave to it when he was beginning the story which he left unfinished at his death as he had been five-and-twenty years earlier, before fame had come to him or fortune was within his grasp.

Wilkie had many good stories, and he told them well. His style was quiet, but emphatic, precise, and perhaps slow, the points cumulative in their effect, most carefully led up to, and ending always in complete success. The pistol never missed fire when Wilkie pulled the trigger. His memory was strong, and his store of good things was plentiful.

Some of his stories concerned his own novels and their readers, and I recall one of them that relates to "The Woman in White." Immediately after the production of that book, when all England was admiring the arch-villainy of the "Fosco," the author received a letter from a lady who has since figured very largely in the public view. She congratulated him upon his success with somewhat icy cheer, and then said: "But, Mr. Collins, the great failure of your book is your villain. Excuse me if I say you really do not know a villain. Your Count Fosco is a very poor one, and when next you want a character of that description, I trust that you will not disdain to come to me. I know a villain, and have one in my eye at this moment that would far eclipse anything that I have ever read of in books. Don't think that I am drawing upon my imagination. The man is alive and constantly under my gaze. *In fact, he is my own husband.*" The lady was the wife of Edward Bulwer Lytton.

Mention of "The Woman in White" reminds me of a story which I may or may not have heard from Wilkie's own lips. After the story had been written and the time had come to begin its serial publication, a title had not yet been found. A story could not be pub-

lished without a title, but neither the author nor his friends could hit on one that seemed suitable. Dickens had been appealed to and had failed. So had Forster, who was prolific in good titles. Wilkie was in despair. The day was approaching when the story must begin in *All the Year Round*. So one day the novelist took himself off to Broadstairs, determined not to return until a title had been found. He walked for hours along the cliff between Kingsgate and what is called Bleak House; he smoked a case of cigars, and all to no purpose; then, vexed and much worn by the racking of his brains, he threw himself on the grass as the sun went down. He was facing the North Foreland Lighthouse, and, half in bitter jest, half unconsciously, he began to apostrophise it thus:

"You are ugly and stiff and awkward; you know you are as stiff and weird as my white woman—white woman—woman in white—the title, by Jove!"

It was done; a title had been hit upon, and the author went back to London delighted.

The idea of the white woman was suggested by a letter from some unknown correspondent, asking him to interest himself in some real or supposed wrongful incarceration in a lunatic

asylum. About the same time he came upon an old French trial (he had many French "Newgate Calendars"), turning upon a question of substitution of persons, and so it struck him that a substitution effected by help of a lunatic asylum would afford a good central idea. He wrote the book and was quite exhausted at the end of it. So he made arrangements for its publication in library form, and went away for a long holiday in a place at some distance, where letters could not reach him.

When he returned home he found his desk piled mountains high with letters from correspondents, and newspapers containing reviews. Also he found his mother (he was still living under the parental roof) in great distress over the severity with which the book had been handled by the press. "Well," he said, "let us see." So he read the reviews first. They were nearly all as bad as it was possible for the good critics to make them. Then he read the letters, and they brimmed over with eulogy.

"Now," thought Wilkie, "this teaches me a lesson. These letters are nearly all from total strangers, and may be said to represent in some measure the opinion of the general

public. These reviews are by professional writers, some of them my intimate friends. Either the public is right and the Press is wrong, or the Press is right and the public is wrong. Time will tell. If the public turns out to be right, I will never trust the Press again."

Thus he waited for the verdict of time, and it seemed to come confidently enough. The end of it was that Collins lost all faith in review articles, and went the length of grievously underestimating their effect on public opinion.

His life was almost that of a hermit. During the last two or three years he went out very little—rarely or never to the theatre, and only one or twice to a dinner. With all the surroundings of an invalid, he had quite a morbid terror of being written about as a dying man. "My heart is *not* affected," he would say, "and there is nothing amiss with me but what they call stomachic nervousness."

One day, toward the beginning of 1888, I called upon him in great excitement about a difference I had just had with a friend with whom I was trying to collaborate. I wished him to adjudicate in the dispute, and he cordially undertook to do so. "State the difficulty," he said, and I stated it with much

fulness. He stopped me again and again—repeated, questioned, and commented. Two hours went by like ten minutes. We were sitting in Wilkie's workshop, with proofs of his current work everywhere about us. The point was a knotty one, and a serious issue seemed involved in it. Wilkie was much worried.

"My brain is not very clear," he said once or twice, taking a turn across the room. Presently, and as if by a sudden impulse, he opened a cabinet, and took out a wine-glass and what seemed to be a bottle of medicine. "I'm going to show you one of the secrets of my prison-house," he said with a smile, and then he poured from the bottle a full wine-glass of a liquid resembling port wine. Do you see that?" he asked. "It's laudanum." And straightway he drank it off.

"Good heavens, Wilkie Collins!" I said, "how long have you taken that drug?"

"Twenty years," he answered.

"More than once a day?"

"Oh, yes, much more. Don't be alarmed. Remember that De Quincey used to drink laudanum out of a jug."

Then he told me a story, too long to repeat, of how a man-servant of his own had killed

himself by taking less than half of one of his doses.

"Why do you take it?" I asked.

"To stimulate the brain and steady the nerves."

"And you think it does that?"

"Undoubtedly," and laughing a little at my consternation, he turned back to the difficult subject I had come to discuss. "I'll see it clearer now. Let us begin again," he said.

"Wait," I said. "You say, my dear Wilkie, that the habit of taking laudanum stimulates your brain and steadies your nerves. Has it the same effect on other people?"

"It had on Bulwer Lytton," answered Collins. "He told me so himself."

"Well, then, Wilkie Collins," I said, "you know how much I suffer from nervous exhaustion. Do you advise *me* to use this drug?"

He paused, changed colour slightly, and then said quietly, "No."

The last time I saw Collins he was in great spirits and full of the "Reminiscences" that he intended to write. He talked of all his old friends with animation, the friends of his youth, "all gone, the old, familiar faces"; and there was less than usual of the dull undertone of sadness that had so often before conveyed the idea

of a man who felt that he had strutted too long on his little stage. He enjoyed his wine and some old brandy that came after it, and a couple of delicious little cigars of a new brand which he loudly recommended. The more serious questions of literature and morality were all banished, and yarn followed yarn. I can only remember a single sad note in his conversation, and it was ominous. He was talking of Dickens, and I think he said he had been engaged to visit at Gad's Hill on the very day that Dickens died.

A few days later Wilkie Collins wrote inviting me to lunch, but naming no particular day. I was to go what day I liked, only remembering to send a telegram two or three hours in advance. So one Sunday morning I wrote a letter telling him that I meant to visit him the following day, and asking him for a telegram to say if the time would do. Instead of Wilkie's telegram there came a message from his affectionate adopted daughter, saying that on the previous morning he had been struck down with paralysis.

He may have had his weaknesses—I know of very few. He may have had his sins—I never heard tell of any. He was loyal and brave and sweet and unselfish. He had none of the vices of the literary character, none, at least, that

ever revealed themselves to me. In the cruel struggle for livelihood that depends on fame he injured no man. He lived his own life, and was beloved by his own people.

I have quoted from Wilkie Collins's letters several passages which show that he could be a severe if wholesome critic, and now in conclusion I will not allow myself to be restrained by any fear of a charge of immodesty from quoting one passage which shows how splendidly generous he could also be:

"You have written a remarkable work of fiction—a powerful and pathetic story—the characters vividly conceived, and set in motion with a master hand. Within the limits of a letter I cannot quote a tenth part of the passages which have seized on my interest and admiration. As one example among many others I should like to quote, let me mention the chapters that describe the fishermen taking the dead body out to sea in the hope of concealing the murder. The motives ascribed to the men and the manner in which they express themselves show a knowledge of human nature which places you among the masters of our craft, and a superiority to temptations to conventional treatment which no words can praise too highly. For a long time past I have read nothing in

contemporary fiction that approaches what you have done here. I have read the chapters twice, and if I know anything about our art, I am sure of what I say."

It would be difficult to say how much good this letter did me when I read it first. Wilkie Collins was then at the height of his fame and prosperity and his correspondent was a beginner, living in two small rooms in the roof on the fourth floor of New Court, Lincoln's Inn.

CHAPTER VIII

MY FIRST PLAY

NOTWITHSTANDING the generous confidence of my friends, coupled, as I fear it was with my own opinion, that under favourable conditions I could write a play, I made no serious attempt to do so until dramatic pirates began to appropriate my novels. Then I remembered Wilson Barrett's request, and sent him my first Manx novel, thinking the subject and chief character might suit him. He answered that both seemed promising, and asked me to see him immediately, for he had reached a crisis in his fortunes when a change in his programme was necessary.

It was early spring, I remember, one of the worst of the second winters that come to our English climate, and I was staying with my people in Liverpool, but with the utmost eagerness I packed my bag and set off for London, hardly knowing yet where the drama lay in my narrative story, and seeing many perplexing difficulties.

A few miles out of Liverpool, travelling by the Midland route, I was overtaken by a very dense fog, and at Derby, to my great chagrin, I was compelled to leave the train; but what seemed to my impatience to be the most vexatious accident proved to be the most fortunate circumstance. The fog, which enveloped almost the whole of England, lasted eight days; I sought refuge from it among the hoar frost in the heights of Dove Dale, and while waiting in the old Isaac Walton Inn (alone there, and thrown entirely on my thoughts) for the clouds to lift that cut me off from London, the clouds in my brain were also dissipated, and I thought my play for all practical purposes was produced.

Then with a full scenario I completed my journey and found Barrett more than content. We struck and signed a bargain straight away, I remember, two guineas a performance for me until my royalties reached eight hundred pounds, when my interest was to end, and though I had not a penny piece of this money in my pocket, and everything depended upon the opinion of the public, and my fortune was like a glistening bubble in the air, I came away from our interview with a sense of possessing more wealth than I had ever yet known to be in the world.

Not only was my money not yet earned, but my play was not yet written, and toil and pain and sleepless nights there were to go through before it got itself done. And even when I came to an end and thought my curtain had fallen for good, I realised from the sharp criticism of my colleague that I had been working in a medium that was new to me, and not all the supernatural wisdom I had won in earlier days as a dramatic critic had taught me the hundred and one technical tricks that are necessary to success on the stage.

What Barrett himself did to make my first play a practical effort it is unnecessary to say, but sure I am that without his knowledge of the "ropes" of the theatre the dramatic instinct on which my friend Blackmore had counted to produce "a grand and moving drama" would have gone for nothing, and, conscious of this, I insisted on coupling Barrett's name with mine when the play came to be produced.

Before that, of course, there were the rehearsals, and though in my ignorance of stage management I took little or no part in them, I remember as a unique experience the first moment when, stumbling through the pall of darkness which lies over "the front of the house" in daytime, I first heard my own lines spoken

by an actor on the stage. It was almost as if something of myself had in a dream, by a kind of hypnotic transfer, passed into the mouth of somebody else.

By the time of the first public performance this elusive sensation had naturally passed away, but then came another emotion equally new to me and yet more thrilling—the emotion created by the tears, the laughter, the applause, and, above all, the silence of the audience. It is just once in a man's life that he produces his first play, and perhaps he may be pardoned if, after the lapse of years, he puts the experience out of proportion.

I think it was a great first night in some respects. The audience was great, for in all the years since I have never seen so many really distinguished people in one place. The acting was great, too, and the reception was generous and almost tumultuous. I remember as something seen in a sort of delirious trance, through a mist of blinding tears, that at the fall of the curtain the whole audience was on its feet, and that when Barrett led me in front of the curtain there was a roar that dazed and stunned me.

It was not until an hour or two afterward that I came to myself in some measure, and then, with my friend Tirebuck, who had come up

from the country to share my great experience, I was tramping up and down Oxford Street in the early morning, and making the silent thoroughfare ring with peals of foolish laughter. Being too poor to think of a room at an hotel, we were to sleep at a little shabby boarding-house in Bloomsbury, and having suddenly remembered that we had not eaten anything since breakfast, we were searching for a restaurant that would be open late enough to give us supper. We found one at length in the form of a smoking coffee-stall at the corner of Berners Street, and there we ate roasted potatoes with a pinch of salt, and then home to our dingy lodgings like creatures walking on the stars.

Next morning the London newspapers contained many eloquent columns on the advent of "the new dramatist," with glowing predictions which I fear have never been fulfilled.

The success, such as it was, of my first play revived an early friendship with Henry Irving, whom I had known during my days in Liverpool. He had been touring in America when my Manx novel was published, and saying to himself, "There's a character in that book [the Bishop] which might be suitable for me," he had resolved to propose a play to me on his return to England. But finding when he came

home that the play was already the property of another actor, he suggested that I should try to do something else for him.

I did try. During many years thereafter I spent time and energy and some imagination in an effort to fit Irving with a part, and the pigeon-holes of my study are still heavy with sketches and drafts and scenarios of dramas which either he or I or our constant friend and colleague, Bram Stoker (to whose loyal comradeship we both owed so much), thought possible for the Lyceum Theatre. I remember that most of our subjects dealt with the supernatural, and that the "Wandering Jew," the "Flying Dutchman," and the "Demon Lover" were themes around which our imagination constantly revolved. But in spite of the utmost sincerity on both sides, our efforts came to nothing, and I think this result was perhaps due to something more serious than the limitations of my own powers.

The truth is that, great actor as Irving was, the dominating element of his personality was for many years a hampering difficulty in the way of popular success. When in my boyhood I knew him first, he was a young fellow of thirty, very bright, very joyous, not very studious, not very intellectual, full of animal vigour, never

resting, never pausing, always rushing about, and hardly ever seen to go upstairs at less than three steps at a time. At the end of his life he was a grave and rather sad old man, very solemn, distinctly intellectual, and with a never-failing sense of personal dignity. Between his earlier and his later days he had done something which I have never known to be done by anybody else—he had created a character and assumed it for himself.

Just as an actor might create a character for the stage, or a novelist for a novel, so Irving had created a character for his own use in real life. It was a character of singular nobility and distinction, but a difficult character, too, not easy to put on, and having little in common with the outstanding traits of his original self—a silent, reposeful, rather subtle, slightly humorous, detached, and almost isolated personality, with a sharp tongue, but a sunny smile and certain gleams of the deepest tenderness—in short, a compound of Voltaire and Cardinal Manning.

There was nothing artificial or theatrical in Irving's assumption of this character, which grew on him and became his own and gave value to every act of his later life; but all the same it stood in the way of his success in a profession wherein the first necessity is that the actor

should be able to sink his own individuality and get into the skin of somebody else.

No man could sink a personality like that of Henry Irving, and toward the end of his life, with the ever-increasing domination of his own character and the limitation of choice which always comes with advancing years, it was only possible for him to play parts that contained something of himself. He was painfully conscious of this for a considerable time, and therefore it was with brightening eyes that he brought to my room one day the typewritten copy of a play on the subject of Mohammed.

"It's not right," he said, "but it's the right subject. See if you can do it over again."

I spent months on "Mohammed," and think it was by much the best of my dramatic efforts; but immediately it was made known that Irving intended to put the prophet of Islâm on the stage, a protest came from the Indian Moslems, and the office of the Lord Chamberlain intervened. This was a deep disappointment to Irving himself, for the dusky son of the desert was a part that might have suited him to the ground, and to me it looked like an overwhelming disaster, slamming the door on the efforts of years, but the story of this incident has been told by Bram Stoker with such truth and such

sympathy in his tender and affectionate reminiscences of our friend that I hesitate to say more.

I have produced many plays since then, but I have never again attempted to fit my subject to the personality of any actor, not even in the case of a personality so pronounced as that of Mr. Tree, and I have never tried again to write independent drama, being content with such chances as the material in my novels affords for treatment in the art of the stage.

That is a noble and beautiful art, but it is not one which ought to be practised, as I fear I have practised it, with the left hand, while the right hand has been otherwise engaged. It asks all a man's time and more than all his energy if it is to yield the best results. Those results are broader now than they were when I began to write, and they include a large moral influence.

In my earliest days in London they produced on the stage a play of Tennyson's, called "The Promise of May." The play was not a good one, but its failure on its first night was not so much due to its artistic defects as to its daring treatment of moral questions. It presented the conventional seducer of innocence, not as a ruffian who ought to be kicked, but as a thinker who had

even something to say for himself. This was grotesque to the English public at that time, and consequently they howled and howled. I alone, or almost alone, with my friend Watts-Dunton, cheered and cheered. It was not that we cared much for the scoundrel on the stage, but that we claimed the right of the drama to deal with moral problems.

That night, in my lodgings in Clement's Inn, I wrote to Tennyson. I meant him to receive my letter with what I knew must be the unfavourable newspapers next morning, and the following day's post brought me the poet's reply:

"I should feel myself very ungrateful if I did not write my thanks for your kind and sympathetic letter.

"I meant Edgar to be a shallow enough theorist. I never could have thought that he would have been taken for an 'ordinary freethinker.'

"The British drama must be in a low state indeed, if, as certain dramatic critics have lately told us, none of the great moral and social questions of the time ought to be touched upon in a modern play.

"A. Tennyson."

That was only a score of years ago, and what have those years witnessed? They have witnessed the rise of Ibsen in England. Think what you like of Ibsen, consider him a morbid, unhealthy, middle-class sceptic, if you will, but you must needs admit that he has once for all brought back the living moral questions to the stage.

It is sometimes said that the public, especially the playgoing public, is a stubborn patron, very narrow in its sympathies and limited in its tastes. I am not in the least of that opinion. So far as I can see, there is only one thing the public demands and will not do without, whether in drama or novel, and that is human nature. It says to the author: "Amuse me! Comfort me! Thrill me! Sustain me!" But it leaves him to please himself how he does it. He can sing what song he pleases. All it asks is, that the song shall be good, and that he shall sing it well enough. Otherwise it may be a song of love, or a ditty of the forecastle. And if the song says something that has a real relation to life, so much the better.

I cannot conclude this chapter, with its few and imperfect notes of my friendship with Henry Irving, without recalling two quaint if rather grotesque tributes to his power as an

actor which came from my father and my mother in those early days of his career when I knew him first.

My father had been born and brought up under conditions as little favourable as anything could be to the appreciation of dramatic talent—on the edge of that bleak coast at Ballaugh in the Isle of Man, with its tiny church, now tumbling out of the perpendicular, where he was baptised nearly a hundred years ago at the little font by the runic cross; with its group of whitewashed farm-buildings lying close and low like a herd of white cattle in a storm; with its broad stretch of gray sea and its rare and far view of the lowering Scotch and Irish hills. Though he broke away from these conditions in early manhood he carried the stark spirit of them with him to Liverpool, and becoming for a time a Methodist of the most primitive type, a class-leader, and I think a local preacher, as well as a politician of the grimmest radicalism, his views of life were fairly representative of what is known, not too wisely, as the Non-conformist conscience.

Toward the theatre and all its doings he held an attitude of determined hostility, and how it came to pass that after sixty years of age he went with me to see Irving play "Ham-

let" I cannot remember or explain except in the light of the fact that the young actor of whom everybody was talking had somehow become a friend of his son. But I recall the evening as if it were yesterday, and the extraordinary effect of a stage play on a mind that had taught itself to regard all imagined things as wicked make-believe. There was first the uncomfortable sense, only too plainly indicated in his face, that he was in a theatre, and if death came to him there what would he have to say for himself?—and then there was an ever-increasing consciousness that he was listening to serious things seriously spoken. Of Shakespeare he knew nothing but the name, and that, I am afraid, was not entirely a badge of honour, but the dramatist was speedily forgotten in his theme. I remember that more than once in the philosophical passages my father said "Hear, hear," and that at the triumphant moments he looked as if he wanted to say, "Glory be to God!" But the crowning tribute to the play and the player came at the end, when, as we walked home together, I asked him how he liked Irving, and he answered:

"What he said was good, very good, it was grand; but, after all, it was not so much what he said as the wonderful way he said it."

PEEL, ISLE OF MAN.

Considering that the play was "Hamlet," I doubt if such another tribute to the power of an actor can anywhere be found.

My mother was born and brought up under conditions equally unfavourable to the appreciation of dramatic talent, and there was the further difficulty in her case that, unlike my father, she was, and is (for at more than eighty years of age she is still with us), though generous to a fault, utterly incapable of enthusiasm. As far as I can remember she had never seen a stage play until she saw Irving in, I think, "Louis XI," when he played it first in the best days of his manhood. In a few minutes the illusion of the drama had completely carried her away, and it was the same to her as if she were looking on a scene in life. More than once it seemed to surprise her that the people on the stage did not see through the King's hypocrisy and wickedness; and when the curtain fell on the first act and we asked her what she thought of the actor, she said:

"I think he acts his part very well indeed—considering he is *such a very old man.*"

CHAPTER IX

MY FIRST VISITS TO AMERICA

I HAVE made four visits to America, but two of them were occupied entirely by business interests, and only the first and second had any real relation to my life as an author. To meet the unknown friends whom my books had won for me across the Atlantic was always a joyful, sometimes an embarrassing, and occasionally an exacting experience. A malady which might well be known by the name of American hospitality awaits every Englishman who has spoken to the hearts of the people of the United States.

I know nothing like it in any other part of the world, and when I read of the reception of Dickens and Thackeray in America, and see how the cities of the States seemed to stand still in order to give to two writers of great books the welcome which is reserved in other countries for soldiers and statesmen, I am as much perplexed as proud. But I know by per-

sonal experience that the hospitality of America is equal to an effort more unaccountable than that, and I remember with gratitude and emotion which will last as long as my life the kindness that was shown to me in the generous country across the Atlantic when the great English nation that is American began to interest itself, through my earlier books, in the little English nation that is Manx.

It would not become me to dwell upon that, further than to recognise and acknowledge it, but it may be allowed to me to speak of certain aspects of American life which come within the purview of a man of letters.

How did I find the interviewer in America? Just as I have found him everywhere—good, bad, and indifferent. Sometimes the American interviewer is a perfectly honest man, who aims only at setting down what you say in all truth and simplicity; and sometimes he is a pert person, who cares a vast deal more about what he says himself. As might be expected, the personal descriptions of the lady interviewer are embarrassingly precise. The colour of your hair and eyes and the pattern of your clothes are facts of the first importance. Hardly any of the interviewers, male or female, write shorthand, and as a consequence the visitor talks the

idiom of the reporter. In certain interviews I found myself saying, "It makes me tired," and "It tickles me to death."

Several imaginary interviews with me were published during my visits to America. In one of these I gave a modest description of my own head, saying the "upper part" resembled Shakespeare's, and the "lower part" resembled Christ's! Flamboyant fictions like these are, I observe, the tit-bits oftenest quoted in England by journals which most affect to look down on American journalism. But whatever the interviewer may be, it is folly of the Englishman in America to attempt to escape from him. As a general statement, I think it would be true that, whether you allow yourself to be interviewed or refuse to allow yourself to be interviewed, you are equally certain to regret it. But that has been my experience in England also.

During the run of one of my plays in New York there was a sad and terrible incident. A young actress died of heart disease in the course of a performance. I chanced to be in the theatre at the moment of the death, and I was still suffering from the shock when I returned to the hotel. Between midnight and one in the morning a reporter sent up his card. He must see

me at once, if only for a moment. I saw him at the door of my bedroom.

"It's about this poor young lady," he said.

"Well?"

"She played *Polly Love*, didn't she?"

"She did."

"The part is a very exciting one, isn't it?"

"There are scenes of some excitement."

"They probably contributed to her death, didn't they?"

"I see no reason to think so, and it would be extremely painful to accept that idea. Besides, heart disease was hereditary in the lady's family."

"Just so! By the way, Mr. Caine, I haven't read your book, but one of my colleagues tells me that *Polly Love* dies suddenly in the novel. Now, don't you think that is an extraordinary coincidence?"

"Perhaps it is, but for mercy's sake don't say so, at least for me. The *Polly* of the novel commits suicide. To bring together the real and the fictitious at a solemn and sacred moment like this would be a shocking and shameful outrage. Don't, I beg of you, make me say anything about that."

"Oh, no, no! Good night!"

"Good night!"

Next morning my interviewer's newspaper published a full and particular account of my opinion that the poor lady's death had been due in great part to the zeal with which she threw herself into her part, and a detailed comparison of the strange and dramatic coincidence of the sudden and startling deaths of the *Polly* of the novel and the *Polly* of the stage.

Another story of the American interviewer. A murderer named Holmes had been tried and condemned in Philadelphia, and was awaiting his execution. One day two journalists from a "yellow" journal called on me at the hotel, bringing a roll of manuscript written by the prisoner.

"This is Holmes's account of his crimes," said one of the men; "he has sold it to our editor on condition that you review it."

"I won't touch it," I answered.

"Don't say that, Mr. Caine. We'll leave it with you, and call for your answer in an hour."

They put the manuscript on a sideboard and went away. Half an hour later another man came up. I thought he looked both nervous and audacious.

"Our editor has sent for Holmes's story, and to know if you have decided to review it," he said.

"No, there it is still; take it away with you," I answered. Then, glancing up quickly, I saw the man reaching out his hand for the manuscript. There was a greedy look in his eye which made me uneasy.

"Wait," I said. "I am an old journalist myself, you know, and I think it would be better form to give the thing back to the men who brought it."

"Well, if you prefer to," said the fellow, and he edged out. In half an hour more the two earlier visitors returned.

"I hope you've decided to do that review," said one of the gentlemen.

"No, I've not," I replied, "and I've told your editor so already by the messenger he sent a little while ago."

Then the men looked at me in blank astonishment.

"What messenger?" they asked.

I described the man who had come for the manuscript. They stared into each other's faces.

"Good ——! It's that fellow —— on the ——!"

A journalist on a rival "yellow" journal, getting wind of their errand, had tried to "scoop" both the murderer's manuscript and my review.

A story of the journalistic photographer. The interviewer is frequently accompanied by an unattached photographer, whose business it is to take snap shots of his subjects in characteristic and, if possible, ridiculous attitudes, at unwary moments. One of the photographic "hawks" came aboard the *Campania* in the customs boat early in the morning of my arrival at New York. For some time he "mooched" about the ship, without doing anything which attracted my attention. Then, as we steamed to the ship's berth, his writing *confrère* came up to me. The sun was shining, we were standing on the promenade deck, under the shade of the hurricane deck, and he drew me to the ship's side, while he pointed out his own lodgings on the fourteenth floor of a lofty sky-scraper. I didn't feel an absorbing interest in his story, and I was rather at a loss to know why he told it to me. A few minutes afterward I heard him telling the same story to my fellow-passenger, Lord Brassey, and a little later to Mr. Godkin, then editor of the *Evening Post*. It began to strike me as funny that this person should be so zealously circulating such valuable information about himself, when all at once I became aware that the snap-shot man was busy behind him. The promenade deck was in shadow, and

this was the piece of collusion by which that artful pair of hawks got their subjects into the sun.

"You did him pretty well," I said to the photographer, when he had finished with Mr. Godkin.

"Oh, he's not the first I've done—see!" and he showed me the list of his morning's "takings." The fiend had got three separate snap shots of myself!

The worst fault of American journalism—its undue love of sensationalism—is fostered by a bad professional practice, that of employing what are called "space writers." These persons are unattached journalists, who are paid by space on the copy that is accepted. Their business is to hunt up out-of-the-way facts. The more startling the fact, the more acceptable it is, and of two space writers dealing with the same incident, that one is employed who brings in the more astounding story. This is a setting of premium on sensation, on personality, on every form of falseness that can take the colour of fact.

Apparently there is no libel law in America strong enough and swift enough to cope with the doings of the space writer. When a New York newspaper published a false accusation of

myself, and followed it up by a still more false apology, and I contemplated an action at law, Mr. Goldwin Smith said, "You might as well take action against a mosquito."

While I was at Washington I discussed this aspect of the lower American journalism with John Hay, then Secretary of State.

"No libel law, however rigorous, will meet the case," he said. "There's only one thing that will meet it."

"What's that?" I asked.

"A horsewhip," he answered.

It would be quite wrong, however, to talk of the interviewer as if he covered the whole field of American journalism. The extraordinary vigour of the every-day work of the American journalist is what first impresses you. He is always "on the nail." To-day's subject is to-day's need, and whether it is the fate of the Philippines or how to sweep the snow out of the streets, the journalist tackles it for all it is worth. Then the general enterprise of the American Press is beyond comparison greater than that of almost every other press in the world. Not even the great London newspapers, with their correspondents in every capital, can surpass the amazing enterprise of the best papers in America. To appreciate this

one has only to reflect that by reason of distance the material of the American paper costs incomparably more, and that nearly every day's paper contains columns of cabled news.

Then the Sunday papers of America, whatever we may think of them as literary products, are examples of journalistic enterprise without parallel in the world. Outside London there is nothing published, whether in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, or Rome, which for interest or quality or yet bulk bears a moment's comparison with the best American Sunday papers. The imagination shown in the mapping out and construction of a typical American newspaper to meet the needs of the largest numbers of readers, is another striking characteristic. Therefore, when we gibe, as it is so easy to do, at the unconscientious and even vulgar aspects of some American journalism, we should remember its good qualities, which are neither few nor hard to find.

One salient fact, however, about the American newspaper is that its first aim is to deserve its name. It is above everything else a paper intended to provide news. A policy it may have, and it may sometimes advocate the interests of a party, but some of the best and most popular American newspapers appear to have neither policy nor party.

"Do you conduct the policy of your paper from Paris?" I said to the proprietor of a well-known American journal.

"My paper has no policy," the proprietor answered; "its business is to give the people news, not to tell them what they are to think."

"But isn't that rather opposed to journalistic traditions?" I asked.

"So much the worse for the traditions," was the reply. "I employ a man at two, three, four, or five thousand dollars to edit this, that, or the other section of my paper, and I should think it a pretty cheeky thing if he undertook to preside over the policy of the country. His business is to record its doings."

But the attitude of the American public toward the American newspaper would in any case be one of complete independence. On the British side of the ocean we are apt to believe what we see in the journals. On the other side of the ocean they betray no such infirmity. The newspapers are so many, the competition between them is so keen, their methods are so manifest, that nobody regards them with the reverence which the mystery enshrouding the anonymity of English journalism still perpetuates among ourselves.

In like manner the personalities of American

GREEBA CASTLE, THE HOME OF HALL CAINE, ISLE OF MAN.

journalism are fenced by the attitude of American readers. They take their spiciest dishes with a proper grain of salt. Hence it is necessary to read the American newspaper with American eyes; seen in that light the journalism of America is neither so sensational nor so flagrant as English readers suppose. For the rest, it would seem to me that the independence of the American mind toward the Press of the country is a most wholesome and hopeful sign. The American public are constantly reversing the verdicts of their professed guides to public opinion. A play or a book which has been the victim of a general onslaught in the newspapers is frequently the idol of the hour.

"In the old days, after a new production," a theatrical manager said to me, "I used to be fool enough to sit up till six in the morning to see what the newspapers had to say."

"And now?" I asked.

"Now, if the audience is right, I go to bed at twelve," he answered.

I went to America on the first occasion partly as the delegate of the English Society of Authors and partly as the informal representative of the Colonial Office to prevail upon the Canadian ministers to withdraw the more objection-

able of the provisions of a Copyright Bill which seemed to conflict with the Imperial Act, and this mission brought me into active relations with American publishers and enabled me to realise that the making of American copyright, for which Dickens and Thackeray pleaded in vain, had done more than secure justice for the English author—it had created the American author as a professional man of letters. Literature as a profession was for the first time beginning to live, and it is no matter of surprise to me that in the few years that have intervened American books have ousted English books in the favour of the American people.

But art has no nationality, and I was never made conscious for a moment that a novelist from the United Kingdom was an alien in the United States. On the contrary, I was always made to feel that there is no country in the world so good as America for an Englishman to travel in. Of course I know how much I may be influenced by personal feelings, and how many of my opinions may be affected by the accident of my own reception. If that is so, it is only as it ought to be. On four visits under varying circumstances, America was good to me, and it is right that I should praise the bridge I passed over.

I love America and the Americans. I love America because it is big, and because its bigness is constantly impressing the imagination and stimulating the heart. I love its people because they are free with a freedom which the rest of the world takes as by stealth, and they claim openly as their right. I love them because they are the most industrious, earnest, active, and ingenious people on the earth; because they are the most moral, religious, and, above all, the most sober people in the world; because, in spite of all shallow judgments of superficial observers, they are the most child-like in their national character, the easiest to move to laughter, the readiest to be touched to tears, the most absolutely true in their impulses, and the most generous in their applause. I love the men of America because their bearing toward the women is the finest chivalry I have yet seen anywhere, and I love the women because they can preserve an unquestioned purity with a frank and natural manner, and a fine independence of sex. I love the constitution of America because its freedom is the freest I know of, because it has broken away from all effete superstitions of authority, whether in Church or State, and has left the rest of the world in the pitiful shadows of both follies,

to toil after it by more than a hundred years.

And if these are qualities which have their defects, I go the length of loving some of the failings of American life and character as well. I love the brusqueness of speech and the freedom of manners which imply that Jack is as good as his master, and sometimes a good deal better. In this connection I can tell a story of a good and loyal, though rather embarrassing friend of mine who is a conductor on a Broadway electric car. He is about twenty years of age, and he has a frank, open face, with bright eyes and a laughing mouth. When I met him first he was standing on the tail-board of the car as I was leaping onto it.

"Will this car take me to Fifty-sixth Street?" I asked.

He did not answer, but looked me over from head to foot.

"Will it?" I repeated.

Instead of replying to my question, he asked another.

"Are you Hall Caine?"

"Yes—will it?" I asked.

Again he did not reply, but, smiling from ear to ear, and holding out a grimy hand, he said:

"Shake!"

CHAPTER X

THE LITERARY LIFE

I HAVE reached the beginning of my last chapter without making more than casual references to my earnings as a man of letters, and I do not now intend to enter into any detailed confidences on that subject. It will be well within the truth to say that money has never at any time been an aim in my life, and that I have never allowed myself to think of it first in regard to any single thing I have ever done. If money has come to me it has certainly not been by "first intention," and if there is anything that hurts me in the published letters of certain great writers who are among the gods of my idolatry it is the presence of the thought that such and such work represents such and such sum.

But, thinking it may cheer the beginner who is trudging through the dark ways of the literary life, knee-deep in disappointments, to see

how stiff a struggle it was to me, I will gladly show how modest were my earnings during many of my earlier years.

I had been working on the *Mercury* for some time at about two hundred pounds a year, eked out by perhaps a hundred more from the *Athenæum* and the *Academy*, when I began to write my first novel. Soon I found myself crippled by want of leisure, and was compelled to realise that I must either abandon my hope of becoming a novelist or curtail my energies, and therefore my earnings, as a journalist. It was a serious crisis, for, taking my heart in both hands, I had married in the meantime, and had other responsibilities. But, after serious deliberation with my wife, hardly knowing where we were or what leap in the dark we were making, with infinite misgiving and most natural, if ludicrous, nervousness, I wrote to my editor in Liverpool asking him—to reduce my salary!

Lovell appears to have been flabbergasted by my letter. He replied that he was frequently requested to increase a salary, but he had never been asked to reduce one, and he was at a loss to know if I was well and if I could be serious. Evidently my good friend thought I must at least be suffering from an acute attack of conscience; so I replied that so far as I knew I

was in perfectly good health, that I was very much in earnest, and that my request was not prompted by any Quixotic dreams, but was based on the most rational economic expectation of earning more in the long run and becoming a novelist as well.

Lovell answered that he would come to see me on the subject. He did so. My salary was reduced by half, and I wrote and published my first novel. Then my modest success as an author emboldened me to think that I could live without journalism at all, and having ceased to write on the *Athenæum* and *Academy* from a conviction that the man who wrote books had no right to review books, I resigned the remaining half of my position on the *Mercury*.

Like the good fellow he was, Lovell would not at first hear of my resignation, and I trust I do not reveal a fact which will shock the proprietors of the paper, among whom is my friend and colleague, Egerton Castle, when I say that during the last year of my connection with the *Mercury* I received my half salary without writing, so far as I can remember, a single line.

Meantime, however, I was casting my bread on the waters with rather reckless prodigality, for it was not immediately that my fiction made

up to me for the loss of journalism. I had been paid a hundred pounds for my first story as a serial, but when I came to publish the book all I could get was seventy-five pounds for the copyright out-and-out. For my second book I fared only a little better, and for my third, my first Manx story, "The Deemster," which contained the work of a laborious year plus the Manx lore acquired during eighteen years of my youth, I received one hundred and fifty pounds in all. I dare say it was as much as I had a right to expect, and I am very far from wishful (whatever my children may be) to chew the cud of my old bargain with my first publisher, whose three books are, I am happy to see, as much alive now as they were when we published them a quarter of a century ago; but the literary beginner will please observe that the story of my struggles is not yet told. I had been writing for ten years, and had published at least five novels, every one of them considered a success, before I had made a penny beyond what was necessary to meet the most modest of daily needs. Since then, so far as I am able to judge, taking the earnings of plays and books together, it is not improbable that as much money has come to me (though so little has remained) as ever came to any one, not now living, who followed the profession of

Dining-Room at Greeba Castle.

the pen; but I see no reason to think that either in bad fortune or good there has been anything exceptional in my experience of the literary life.

If I have had more wages than most of my fellow-writers, I think I have also had less, and assuredly I have never thought that money was the only currency in which my profession paid me. Of all work I think literary work is the last that ought to be measured against the money one gets for it. Much or little, the money has no relation to the expenditure of one's self, one's soul, which writing, if it comes from the heart, requires. The consciousness of having done a good piece of work is the reward to be reckoned with first.

Trying, however feebly, to follow literature in that spirit, I have found the profession of letters a serious pursuit, of which in no country and in no company have I had reason to be ashamed. It has demanded all my powers, fired all my enthusiasm, developed my sympathies, enlarged my friendships, touched, amused, soothed, and comforted me. If it has been hard work, it has also been a constant inspiration, and I would not change it even now for all the glory and more than all the emoluments of the best-paid and most illustrious profession in the world.

It is indeed a profession in which the struggle for life is always keen and often bitter, and I must have written this book ill if, in spite of any optimism, that fact has not emerged. Open to everybody, having no tests, no diplomas, issuing no credentials, and being practically without organisation, the literary profession is perhaps the easiest of all for the rank and file to enter, and the most difficult for them to rise in. On the other hand, it is a mansion that has many outer courts, all opening into the central chamber. There are hundreds of newspapers and magazines in the United Kingdom waiting day by day or week by week to be filled, and the hunger for "copy" can never be satisfied. Every morning millions of people at their breakfast tables are saying, "Interest me! Entertain me! Startle me!" and every night hundreds of thousands in the theatres are asking to be amused or moved. For the writer whose grip is strong, whose romance is really romantic, whose pathos is pathetic, whose power is powerful, there is an ever-increasing clamour. He must know his work and have lived and perhaps suffered, but there is no question about the extent of his appeal. Whether he is journalist or novelist or dramatist, whether he raises his curtain on a tragedy or a farce, in high life or

low life, on the land or on the sea, an immense audience is always waiting to welcome him.

It is true that in the profession of letters a man's vogue is apt to be brief, but brevity is a condition which attaches itself to great success in nearly all professions, and long life in literature, as in law and medicine, is only to him who can grow with the growing years and live up to the last hour of his time. If a man cannot do this, he must not complain that after he has had his day a new generation should be knocking at the door.

It is true, too, that in the profession of letters some of the sweetness of success is likely to be drained away by jealousy and envy, as well as by the operation of natural laws that have little or no relation to bad passions of any sort. The literary man must make up his mind to criticism; he must recognise the certainty that the worst of it will always come from his own class, often from his own juniors, sometimes from those who find him where they themselves would be, and generally anonymously. This last is a condition peculiar to literature, but perhaps it is not harder to bear than that of the politician who gets his criticism full in the face from the opposite benches in Parliament, or that of the lawyer, who takes it in open snub-

bings from a judge, or that of the parson, who gets it in wild tornadoes at his Easter vestry. At least it leaves the author at liberty to ignore criticism if he has a mind to do so, and thus spares him the loss of self-respect, which too frequently comes of fighting one's adversary, even when one beats him.

When two of my literary friends were quarrelling in their attempt to collaborate, one of them said:

"But see what insulting letters you send me!" Whereupon the other replied:

"You should see the letters I don't send you, though!"

I think of that answer with a certain satisfaction when I look at the letters, often very intemperate and indiscreet, which I have sent to the newspapers in reply to my own critics, and at the same time remember the letters I have kept to myself. And if an author who has not always "recked his own rede" may offer advice to the literary beginner who is tempted to reply to criticism, however unjust or apparently injurious, I will say that, inasmuch as few men have ever gained by combativeness, it is at once the easiest and most effective course to leave your adverse critics to themselves.

Of all the incidents in literary history, the

most pitiful, I think, is that of Gogol, the father of Russian fiction, going about in his last days from country house to country house with a carpet-bag full of adverse notices of his great novel, "Dead Souls," reading them again and again, exhibiting them to his friends, complaining of them, railing against them, permitting them to suck his life-blood like so many literary leeches, until they killed him in his misery and shame. The shocking waste of Gogol's valuable life becomes hideously apparent when one says to one's self, "'Dead Souls' is here still, but where are the adverse notices, and, in the name of Heaven, what were they?"

There is only one writer who can really injure any author, and that writer is himself. If his work is bad, it will die of the seeds of dissolution it carries within it, but if it is good, it will live, and long before the little turmoils of critical condemnation have passed into the limbo of fatuities, the public will stand abashed and wondering at censure so stupid and so unaccountable. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom.

The beginner's experience, however, will not be like mine if he does not find that among his critics are some whose wise counsel, as well as generous praise, have encouraged, sustained, stimulated, and even inspired him. Many of

my warmest friends have been won for me from the critics of my books, and when I think of what Charles A. Cooper, the late editor of the *Scotsman*, did for me in my earlier years of novel-writing, I am ready to forgive and to forget any hard word that any of his fellow-journalists may have written and published against me.

And this leads me to say that the literary life has joys which, so far as I know, belong to no other profession, and I count among the chief of them the tributes that come from the readers of one's books. I can hardly suppose that my experience in this regard has not been shared by my brother authors when I say that during the past twenty years there cannot have been a day on which I have not received letters, sometimes many letters, from unknown correspondents, who have had nothing to ask or gain in writing to me. The sense of having, however unwittingly, come closer to some of them than a brother, closer than a sister, sometimes as close as their inmost soul, has been one of the most precious rewards of the literary life, and there is no other profession, so far as I can see, that could have given me a joy so true and lasting as that.

Then in the reckoning of one's return for pro-

ducing books I count the delight of writing them. I remember that in my days with Rossetti there was a story of how William Morris reproved a young author for complaining that his book had brought him no money.

"What are you grumbling about?" said Morris. "Didn't the work do you good and make you a better man? Do you want to be paid twice over?"

But the writer who loves his work, and is so happy as to make the public love it also, is paid over and over again. If in the course of this book I have dwelt too frequently on the penalties of literary production, it is partly because I have always worked against the odds of health that has never been good, and of a temperament that is not too sanguine; but let me leave no uncertainty that in my view the delights of literary work far outweigh its labour and pain.

What literary work is to the literary worker must depend largely upon what the man is himself. To Walter Scott it was a perfect fountain of joy; for he always wrote as if it did him good, like riding and swimming. Dickens, too, bubbled and boiled with the delights of mere composition, but Flaubert laboured along with a strain that was strong and continuous.

No matter which of these classes of creators

the imaginative writer belongs to, sure it is that if he is to stir the public to enthusiasm, his own enthusiasm must be kindled first. And this enthusiasm in the act of creation, if not of production, is perhaps the highest joy of the literary life. Without it there is nothing done that is worth doing, and no reward that is worth fighting for. Oh, that one could keep forever burning the fire of fusion, the central glow out of whose depths all creative work should come! But no one knows better than the novelist and dramatist how life and the world, and even self-criticism itself, are perpetually quenching the ardour of his spirit.

Here again, however, I see in the literary life a wider horizon than any other profession appears to offer. Whatever a man's outlook on the world, he may reproduce it in literature and be sure of finding a public that sees eye to eye with him. Does he see life as a comedy, there are multitudes who also see it so; and if he sees it as a tragedy or as a cynical farce or as a parti-coloured mixture of all three, there are always people enough to look through his lens. And just as there is no restriction as to the literary man's point of view, so there is no limit to his subject. He may pick out a little corner of life and produce a local picture, or he may

take from the world's mountain tops the broadest sweep his sight can reach. If he has any of the larger consciousness of the place of man in the universe, he may develop it, for there is no one to prevent the free fruition of what is his own. If life has said anything to him, if suffering has taken him down into the deep places of human experience, he can make his work revolve about the highest message or motive his soul can reach, for there is nobody to disturb the strength and dominance of his first intention. In the broad world he speaks to there are people to hear whatever he has to say, and they listen to him in numbers large or small, according as he addresses himself to their needs. I know of no other profession that offers so wide a range for the exercise of varying talents with varying temperaments, and therefore none in which success of some kind can be reasonably expected.

If I may further glorify my own calling, as I think I am in loyalty free to do, I will also say that of all professions the profession of letters has the largest and the most lasting influence. In the progress of the nations from the barbarity of statecraft, I see no force that is so surely making for the peace of the world as the force of education whereby the great national

literatures are becoming one literature. I may hate and loathe the Russian Government, and in any difference it may have with the government of England I may be a rabid Englishman, but when I open the books of Tolstoy and enter with him into the houses of the moujiks, and live their lives and share their joys and sorrows, I love the Russian people, and hate the thought that my country can ever go to war with them.

And while the range and the power of the literary life is such as I have tried to describe, I count it not the least of its advantages as a profession that it can be practised everywhere, by any person, and by either of the sexes. The man of letters may live in a palace, and nobody thinks the better of his work; or he may live in a garret, and nobody thinks the worse. He may write in town or in the country, at home or abroad, at the top of Helvellyn or at the bottom of a coal-mine, and the matter is of no moment to anybody except himself. He may plunge into the turmoil of the life of his time, or he may hold aloof from the "momentary momentousness" of passing problems, and it is nobody's business except his own. Once the public has pronounced in his favour, it has emancipated him from a score of shackles which bind

men of other professions to time and place, and his freedom is the freest in the world.

But while this is so, it is also true that the spirit of literature is very jealous of the conditions under which she is pursued, and very watchful of the purpose for which she is followed. Literature is a mistress that will not share her lover with any rival, and if she is to unveil her face in all its beauty, it can only be in the still atmosphere of the harem.

When I think of the ideal life for the man of letters I have to dismiss the memory of the lives of the great men of my own branch of the craft —Dickens in his last days, dragging his poor dying body through America, while he gave public readings of his writings, with his pulse at 117 and his temperature at 102 degrees; and Walter Scott struggling to establish a family while writing abroad to preserve his health and to pay his creditors, and then climbing up in the carriage as he drove home for the last time to catch sight, through eyes half blind with tears, of the towers of Abbotsford.

Instead of these heart-breaking records of the lives of great writers, I love to think of the life of Wordsworth, and I cannot do better than conclude my book with a flashlight picture of a literary life that was totally unlike the tumultu-

ous scrambling of my own, and far above the unsatisfied ending of any of the lives I have yet described in these pages, being so calm, so simple, so noble, and so right.

Wordsworth practised the literary art for something like sixty years, and during the greater part of that time he met with little or no encouragement. His first works were received with howls of derision, and on the appearance of one of his last a great critic wrote, "This will never do." All the same, he went on writing, never questioning his poetic vocation, never murmuring because critical applause did not come to him, never looking for the wages of popular success. He was always poor, and he lived the life of a dalesman, first in a cottage in Grasmere, and afterward in a modest home at Rydal. Famous men of letters like Scott and Jeffrey and Christopher North came to see him there, drawn by his greatness, not his renown. At long intervals he visited London, and three or four times in the course of his life he made thrifty journeys abroad.

He was always profoundly interested in the great movements of the world, but he cared nothing for the activities of the passing hour. The life he lived, as he once said, had nothing in common with Westminster elections and Mrs.

Such-a-One's five o'clock teas. Steadily, steadfastly, without the stimulus of applause or the impetus of pecuniary success, he went on for nearly fifty years giving the world of his best.

Then the nation, which had paid him no homage hitherto, remembered him at last. It gave to his poverty a small paid position, and to his pride the rank of poet-laureate. Once in his latest days he came up to Cambridge, and the audience in the theatre of the University rose to its feet and shouted its welcome in a roar of cheers. It was a theatrical climax of infinite pathos that he, the poor country commissioner of stamps, who had lived out the long tale of the days of his strength in obscurity, broken by derision, with labour unbrightened by reward, had come into the heritage of his fame when he was feeble and white-headed and old. Yet if the demonstration was grateful even to him who built his big hopes on no such things, to us, after all, what is it but a note of glorious discord in the harmony of his simple life? It was like hanging a mantle of silk velvet over a coat of russet cloth; like perching a crown of bay-leaves on a furrowed forehead honoured enough by the snows of time.

The story of Wordsworth's death and burial is one of the sweetest in literary history. For

more than a year the poet had been a dying man. In the late autumn of 1849, when William Johnson, the author of a brief and little-known memoir, parted from him at nightfall on the bridge that crosses the Rotha, Wordsworth took his hand and said:

"I am an old man, nearly fourscore, and perhaps may not live to see you again—farewell! God bless you!" Then his drooping figure disappeared in the darkness.

On April 14, 1850, in the cold, bright evening, he went out of his house for the last time, walking as far as the cottage by the quarry at the northern end of the lake, sitting there on a stone by the roadside, and then toiling heavily back with much pain and weakness, and going early to bed. On the 19th it was known that no hope was left; that he was sinking rapidly, and that the end was near. On Saturday, the 20th, his son John asked if he would take the Sacrament, and he answered, "It is what I wanted." On Tuesday he died.

They said it was exactly at twelve that he passed away, and that a cuckoo clock that stood in the death-room was singing the hour of noon. The day was fine and clear and warm, the sun came out at intervals, and two ladies, friends of the poet's family, were climbing the hills

PROBABLY THE LAST PORTRAIT OF TENNYSON.

above the house and looking down upon it and talking sadly of the event expected, when suddenly the windows were closed and the white blinds drawn. It was almost as if they had witnessed from those heights the faring forth of the great soul that was even then winging its way to Heaven. Thus Wordsworth died in his mountain home, with its long seaward gaze, amid its old familiar hills and above its sedgy lake, on April 23d, a day already written in gold in literary history as the birthday and deathday of Shakespeare.

In his last hour he was surrounded by his family only, for he had outlived the generation of men who had been his brethren in youth—Coleridge and Southey and Lamb; and the later generation of friends whom the new fame of the old poet had won for him were far away. His strong soul had supported him through twenty years of ridicule and fifty years of neglect; it had not forsaken him through his poor ten years of recognition, adulation, and flattery; and he died in content, in peace, and without pain, hardly any one being quite aware of the moment when he ceased to breathe. The same day his son John wrote to tell Rogers, his son-in-law, Quillinan, wrote to Crabbe Robinson, and somebody else wrote to Henry Taylor. There was

not a note of mourning in the letter of either and hardly a word of grief. Why should there have been? No man can die less than the great poet who dies when his work is done.

They buried Wordsworth on Saturday, April 27th, in Grasmere churchyard. That is one of the sweetest spots in all the world, the little dotted plot lying low, with its old gray church, in the arms of the green hills, within its half-circular road, breasted by its beautiful river, and shaded by its spreading yews. The poet's wife was present at the funeral, in the end as at the beginning, "an angel, yet a woman, too." She was very old, and had long been ailing, and a month before, when some one on the road had asked about her health, the poet had answered: "I think she suffers less pain, but no one can tell, for she never complains."

She walked after the coffin between her two sons, and with her son-in-law behind her, bowed and feeble, yet bearing herself calmly. Few or none had been invited to join them, but the little churchyard was more than half filled with unbidden mourners, of all country ranks and ages, chiefly the rude statesmen of the dale. As far as I can see, no men of letters were there. The grave was where the poet himself had chosen it when he selected a resting place for poor, rest-

less "laal Hartley" Coleridge, and then turned to the sexton and said, "And keep this other place for me."

It is in the sweetest corner of that sweet spot. A gravel path goes round it, and the low wall of the churchyard is very close at its foot and at its side. When the day dawns it is the first bed in the dale to know it, and being out of the shadow of the church, it is the last to parley with the setting sun. And the beautiful river, the Rotha, which babbles and laughs before it comes to this corner and again laughs and babbles beyond it, flows deep and silent and with a solemn hush as it goes slowly under the quiet place of the poet's rest.

There they buried Wordsworth on that little edge of land where scarce twenty persons could gather without crowding. The morning was fine, with the breath of summer and the smile of spring, but a frosty mist had rolled down in the night, and over the hills and the meadows and the church roof and the two yew trees which the poet had planted when he buried his Dora, there lay a soft, gray, hoary bloom. Along the village street the cries of the children were hushed, and the anvil of the smith was quiet, but the cattle lowed in the fields, and the sheep bleated on the fells, and the water slipped down

the ghylls, and all nature was just as it had ever been when he who was being laid away in the deep repose of death had seen and loved it.

Such was the death and burial of Wordsworth, and I should like in a last word to compare both with the death and burial of another poet of something like the same magnitude and genius—a poet who, like Wordsworth, held himself in personal seclusion throughout his long life, but was not allowed to be laid at rest in the simplicity which he loved. A new order of things had arisen in a few years between Wordsworth and Tennyson, and perhaps it was natural that the sweet oblivion of a peaceful silence should not any longer surround the circumstance of a great man's death. For ten days before Tennyson died the newspapers were filled with the name of the great poet, and the eye of England was on him alone. While he lived we watched by his bed, marking every change in his condition, and when he died we stood in his death-chamber, seeing the moonlight resting on his grand old head and on the hand that held open the page of "Cymbeline." When his body was put into the coffin we were told of it, and we were told, too, when it was brought on its last night ride from his home in the country to Westminster Abbey. We

were told who made his pall, and the nature and design of it; and, when the final page of his history had to be filled up, we read the names of some two hundred out of more than twice two thousand who followed him to his grave.

I was one of the latter, and I well remember the effect produced upon me by the funeral of the greatest man of letters of my time. The ceremony was noble in its scene and its proportions, and in the presence of nearly all the intellect of the land. But for those of us who had no personal recollections of the dead poet to touch us with tender memories, there was little to bring the tears to the eyes and the throb to the throat, and not much to stir the imagination or to hold the heart as by a spell.

I myself felt the incongruity of the martial scene as the funeral of a great writer. There was something out of keeping in the spectacle of Tennyson, who had hidden himself from the world throughout his life, exposed to its gaze in his death. He loved the meadows, the flowers, the elemental passions of humble life; he was a child of nature, and he fled from the glare of what stands to the children of the world for the eye of the light. Him the utmost pomp of a funeral could not ennoble, for whom God has made a noble poet is already a noble

man. And now that the splendid ceremony is so many years past, in the gross reckoning of his fame, what is it? Only a line in his history, a passing word that makes no noise, a fact that adds nothing to his gift, and pays nothing of our debt and leaves him where Wordsworth is without it.

I remember that, feeling this very keenly in the mid-day of Tennyson's funeral, I walked down to Westminster again at night. The little door in the cloisters was open, and I stepped into the Abbey. It was dark, save for the shifting light of a lantern over the place of the poet's grave, where two or three masons, with shrill taps of their trowels, were cementing down the covering stone. And then I felt that, different as had been the circumstances of the burials of Tennyson and Wordsworth, that was an hour when the scene of their graves was the same, though the one was in the heart of London and the other in the arms of the fells.

The crowds were gone, with their eager eyes and curious questions, and the grave was filled and the stone slid over it, and the cloisters were empty and the transept dark, and one great star "globed itself" through a window of the clerestory, and the black columns of the nave bowed their heads like phantoms, and the clock chimed

in the tower, and only the footsteps of the porters echoed in the aisles, and the great poet lay alone at length, "compassed round by the blind walls of night," as silent in the surroundings of his last sleep as if no bawling, clamouring, garrulous city rolled and rushed about him, and he slumbered with his simple predecessor in the deep solitude of the sleeping hills.

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